

A Practical Application of Technical Assistance in a Community Based Rehabilitation Program

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Abstract

Academic needs of Deaf students coupled with funding issues created the need for an innovative distance education course between two post secondary institutions. Funding issues created a strict enrollment policy that threatened the small, specialized English classes for Deaf students. The challenge to preserve these classes and meet the enrollment requirement caused the staff to turn to technology as a way of providing instruction in a unique way.

Oklahoma's new intercollegiate/university distance media, ONE NET, was chosen. Using this technology would allow more Deaf students from other institutions to benefit from a specialized course taught by a Deaf instructor; thus reducing the replication of programs and enhancing the ability to share resources

It is the hope that by sharing trials, errors and successes of this pilot program other colleges and universities will investigate distance education and the use of technology as applicable to further their educational outreach to Deaf students.

Technical assistance is a process that simultaneously involves a personal relationship and program development. This is a case study of an organization that received technical assistance, Diversified Personnel Services (DPS), and the agency that provided technical assistance, the

Center for Sight and Hearing (or the Center) an Outreach Site of the Midwest Center for Postsecondary Outreach at St. Paul Technical College, St. Paul, Minnesota. The initial contact was made by DPS for assistance to expand their existing job placement program to include persons who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. The process began with a needs assessment that provided DPS with a picture of available resources and additional resources needed to establish the program. DPS approached the Center and, after an initial consultation, accepted technical assistance. As the personal relationship among the authors of this case study developed, so did the trust necessary to maintain this process of technical assistance. The end result of this partnership was a successful expansion of the placement program and improved services for individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing.

Technical assistance, as practiced in PEPNet, is a peer to peer process with the goal of establishing or expanding services for persons who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. The term *technical assistance* may be defined in a rather fuzzy way as advice or information provided on or off site to direct service delivery staff, support personnel, or administrators to meet the broad goal of improving services. One way to explain technical assistance is to look at an example in-depth from both the perspective of the agency requesting assistance and that of the provider. This case study examines the relationship between Diversified Personnel Services (DPS) and the Center for Sight and Hearing (the Center), an Outreach Site of the Midwest Center for Post-

secondary Outreach at St. Paul Technical College, St. Paul Minnesota. The process of technical assistance may occur as follows:

- Assessment of the needs of the consumers, funding source, and agency;
- Determination of available resources from the consumers, funding source, and agency;
- Identification of needed resources to institute the program or service;
- Development of a proposal for technical assistance to include details of what is to be done and the expected outcomes; and,
- Delivery and receipt of technical assistance.

The relationship between the two agencies is examined as it developed along the lines as listed above.

Agency Description

Diversified Personnel Services is a division of Opportunities, Inc., with offices in Fort Atkinson, Watertown, Waukesha and Oconomowoc, Wisconsin. The agency employs 90 personnel and has an annual operating budget of \$12 million. In operation since 1966, Opportunities Inc. has multiple funding sources including the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Special Education, the sale of various prime manufactured items and subcontract work with local business and industry. Opportunities Inc. served 900 persons with disabilities in 1999 and placed 150 into competitive employment. DPS is an employment service for business and industry in central Wisconsin and places both disabled and non-disabled people into the workplace.

The Center for Sight and Hearing is a community rehabilitation program located in Rockford, IL. In operation since 1962, approximately 400 persons with a hearing and/or vision loss are served annually in a variety of programs ranging from job placement to low vision examinations to an after school program for children who are Deaf. One part of the Center's services is as an outreach site for the Midwest Center for Postsecondary Outreach at St. Paul Technical College in St. Paul, Minnesota. Outreach activities include dissemination of information about serving students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, professional development activities for faculty or staff, and technical assistance as requested.

One of the most important elements of the technical assistance process is the relationship developed between the persons giving and receiving technical assistance. The four persons involved in this process wrote this case study and while the organizational affiliation is used to indicate the elements of implementation, it is equally as important to recognize the relationship aspect of technical assistance.

The Technical Assistance Process

Because the request was initiated by DPS, the process started with them and began with two concurrent events. First, a vocational placement specialist with experience serving persons who are Deaf was hired by DPS in May 1996. The specialist began providing limited placement services to the Deaf population in the counties surrounding the DPS office. Next, the vocational rehabilitation counselor for the Deaf and members of the community approached DPS and asked them to expand their existing job placement services. Specifically, the request was for DPS to become more intentional in their efforts to serve persons who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing by establishing a program.

Assessment of Needs

DPS conducted a needs analysis through informal discussions and formal meetings with Deaf consumers, personnel from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), and internal staff. Three distinct needs were identified:

1. Individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing needed a service within their mostly rural, underserved community;
2. DVR needed the service to meet community demands; and,
3. DPS was providing traditional job placement services, and these were not adequate to meet the needs of Deaf individuals referred for assistance with job placement.

Determine Available Resources

As part of the needs assessment, DPS also looked at resources currently in place. Within the organization, one skilled deafness professional was on board and functioning within an already established placement program for both disabled and

non-disabled workers. There were also existing administrative supports (management, business office, established offices in three towns, etc.) and an organization that was well known in the community. DPS was already connected with the Workforce Development Center and numerous public and private sector organizations. In addition, upper management was supportive of the idea to establish a program for persons who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing.

Another important factor was the very strong ties DPS had with the potential funding source, DVR. The adult DPS programs are outcome-based so payment is only for services that are successful—such as, a person is placed on a job for at least 90 days. The DPS/DVR relationship was strong, because DPS had a proven track record. In addition, DVR had a potential to fund the project with a combination of state and federal funds.

Identify Needed Resources

DPS had a vision of what was to be accomplished—develop a job placement service for individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. They also identified supports in place to assist the program's success and a likely funding source. The timing was right to propose the placement services specifically for this population. DPS needed to formalize the proposal and sought technical assistance to accomplish this goal.

During a discussion between DPS and DVR, a DVR counselor suggested DPS contact the Center for possible technical assistance. The counselor's suggestion was the result of outreach activities from the Center to the Wisconsin DVR offices. DPS contacted the Center and the idea of a placement program for Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals was discussed.

Development of a Proposal

A verbal proposal between the four authors of this case study was developed at a meeting at the Center. Specific assistance was needed to develop, write, and deliver a proposal to Wisconsin DVR. Because there was no formal request for proposals, there was not an official format to use to develop the written proposal. In addition, because this was a unique program in Wisconsin, there was not a model to aid in proposal development.

The ensuing verbal contract was for the Center to help develop a proposal outline, to review and provide feedback on the written proposal, and to assist with preparation for the oral presentation. During the writing of the proposal, an additional request for the Center staff to serve as program evaluators was added.

Delivery and Use of Technical Assistance

Writing of the proposal fell on the shoulders of DPS; editing and assistance with targeting key concepts was provided by the Center. One example involved a clarification of the role of the deafness professional. Because the proposal was to be reviewed by persons who may not be familiar with a professional who is also fluent in sign language, it was important to make sure that a distinction was made between providing communication assistance and interpreting. Interpreting was already available in the area and it would be easy to see this as a duplication of services without a clear explanation.

In November 1998 DPS was awarded a Third Party Establishment grant to begin in December 1998 and end on September 30, 1999. The goals for this nine-month cycle were:

- Admit and serve 30 people from five counties;
- Place 20 people into competitive employment;
- Close 8 individuals as successful, which means that the individual completes at least 90 days of employment.

At the end of the first year, Center staff were invited to evaluate and celebrate the first year. The on-site visit had two components. First we had fun and a dinner. Next, we toured the facilities and reviewed the year's results. The program was quite successful as thirty-five people were served, twenty-two people were placed, and eight people were closed successfully in a variety of jobs. Assistance was also provided on the grant year-end report format, and some changes were made in the data collection and interpretation procedures for the next cycle.

Recently, Center staff assisted in the development of an evaluation report format for the second year that accentuated DPS' successes and clarified the statistical presentation. The provision of technical assistance continues to

date in the areas of data collection, reporting, and program evaluation.

Building the Relationship

Two of the key elements that contributed to the success of this technical assistance are trust and mutual respect. DPS staff had to risk sharing of their need for assistance with proposal development and trust the assistance provided. Center staff recognized the expertise of DPS staff and served as providers of information and suggestions as a complement to enhance the DPS program. This relationship took time and evolved over many telephone calls, emails, and face-to-face meetings. As the trust grew, it became easier to give and take suggestions because the goal was and is to improve services.

Summary

Technical assistance is a process that simultaneously involves a personal relationship and program development. In this case study, the initial contact was made by DPS for assistance to expand their existing job placement program to include persons who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. The process began with a needs assessment that provided DPS with a picture of available resources and additional resources needed to establish the program. DPS approached the Center and, after an initial consultation, accepted technical assistance. As the personal relationship among the authors of this case study developed, so did the trust necessary to maintain this process of technical assistance. The end result of this partnership was a successful expansion of the placement program and improved services for individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing.