E X E C U T I V E   S U M M A R Y

PURPOSE

To determine the perceptions of State child care administrators regarding technical assistance provided under contracts with the Administration for Children and Families (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The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 repealed a number of child care programs and created a single, integrated Child Care and Development Block Grant for low-income families.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 include: promoting parental choice; encouraging States to provide consumer education to parents; and helping States implement health, safety, licensing, and registration standards. The program is currently funded for a total of $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, audio conference calls, and creation of the National Child Care Information Center. In 1997, ACF further expanded its technical assistance capabilities by creating the Child Care Technical Assistance Network.

We surveyed State child care administrators regarding their sense of the technical assistance provided and the extent to which it meets their needs. We asked them about the format, content, and logistical support for the technical assistance they received.

FINDINGS

Format

Large national conferences and small regional meetings are the most beneficial technical assistance formats. Thirty-five of the 49 administrators indicate they find large national conferences the most beneficial format because it provides them with opportunities to network with other State administrators and learn from one another. For the same reasons, 32 administrators also find small regional meetings more beneficial than some technical assistance formats. They comment that regional events also provide them opportunities to more directly address State and regional issues.

The National Child Care Information Center is also a valuable technical assistance tool. Almost all State child care administrators are familiar with the National Child Care Information Center and the Child Care Bulletin published by the Center. They report information received from the Center is helpful, timely, and meets some of their technical assistance needs.

Improvements are needed to make audio conference calls more effective. Administrators find audio conference calls are not always timely and often only serve to convey information they have already received in writing. They also comment they need more advance notice of upcoming audio conference calls.

Content

State administrators are more satisfied with the content and focus of national conferences than other technical assistance events. When asked to rate their satisfaction with the content and focus of technical assistance based on whether or not the issues addressed their needs and concerns, most administrators expressed satisfaction with national conferences. Significantly fewer were satisfied with the content and focus of other types of technical assistance events.

Payment rates, Federal reporting, child care information systems, and public-private partnerships top the list of State technical assistance needs. Thirty-two administrators identified establishing payment rates to insure equal access to child care as an area in which they are most in need of technical assistance. It is followed by Federal reporting, child care information systems, and public-private partnerships as other areas where technical assistance is most needed.

State administrators are unsure whether the focus of the new technical assistance network of projects will address their individual State's technical assistance needs. Forty-one of the 49 State administrators are aware of the new technical assistance network of projects. While they are generally satisfied the technical assistance areas selected to make up the new network will address national needs, they are less satisfied that the new technical assistance network will meet individual State needs.

Logistical Support

Some logistical support areas need improvement. State administrators are generally satisfied with hotel accommodations, meeting facilities, and travel arrangements. However, they are less satisfied with the timeliness of agendas and advance notices of upcoming events, organization of registration packages, accuracy and completeness of participant lists, and the timeliness of travel reimbursement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our respondents obviously valued many aspects of ACF's technical assistance program. Based on our analysis of their responses and their own suggestions, we recommend that ACF focus on the five following general approaches to enhance their program.

- - *Maintain and improve effective technical assistance formats.*
- - *Focus technical assistance on areas of interest to program administrators.*
- - *Improve logistical support.*
- - *Continue to support the National Child Care Information Center, but enhance the technical assistance provided by the website.*
- - *Reevaluate the structure and content of audio conference calls to better meet State administrators' needs.*

The report contains specific suggestions for each of these areas.

AGENCY COMMENTS

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

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