



ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE: A CASE STUDY FROM THE MATERNAL, INFANT, AND EARLY CHILDHOOD HOME VISITING PROGRAM

The Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program supports voluntary, evidence-based home visiting services for at-risk pregnant women and parents with young children who have not entered kindergarten yet. It is administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) in partnership with the Administration for Children and Families. HRSA contracted with different vendors, including the Education Development Center (EDC) to give technical assistance (TA) to states and territories that receive MIECHV funds (referred to here as awardees). This case study describes HRSA’s and EDC’s efforts to meaningfully and efficiently measure the effectiveness of their TA.

Why does the MIECHV Program measure TA’s effectiveness? HRSA measures TA effectiveness to improve the TA. Measurement, continuous learning, and improvement are incorporated into all aspects of the MIECHV Program. MIECHV awardees must measure their program performance, and HRSA expects the same from its TA providers. In HRSA’s words, measuring TA performance is part of a “continuous quality improvement framework that reinforces an organizational culture and expectation for continual learning.”

What does the TA look like? EDC delivers two types of MIECHV TA: universal (available to all awardees) and targeted (given to specific awardees based on their request and/or an identified need). One way EDC provides targeted TA is through the Home Visiting Collaborative Improvement and Innovation Network (HV CoIIN), which gives one-on-one coaching and peer-to-peer calls and meetings to a learning network as it tests specific interventions.

How do TA providers use performance measures? TA performance measures track progress toward a shared set of TA goals, and help TA providers deliver better services so awardees achieve superior results. TA performance measures inform adjustments to TA because they yield real-time data on what works and hold TA providers accountable for offering

services that are high in quality and valuable to awardees.

How did HRSA and EDC select measures of TA performance? HRSA and EDC developed a theory of change that reflects what they want to accomplish through TA (their overall SMART¹ aim) and the drivers they see as contributing the most to it. For each driver, they identified at least one TA performance measure.

Example driver and performance measure from MIECHV’s TA theory of change

Theory of change component	Example
SMART aim: What they want to accomplish	95% of MIECHV awardees who ask for or are identified as needing support will receive high quality TA.
Primary driver: What needs to happen to achieve the SMART aim	Technical assistance is outcome-driven (e.g. leads to a change in practice)
Performance measure: How EDC knows they are going in the right direction	95% of awardees take at least one action step as a result of TA provision

After identifying six primary drivers, HRSA and EDC selected measures that indicated whether or not they were meeting the specified goal for each primary driver and ultimately their SMART aim.

¹ Specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound.



How do HRSA and EDC measure TA performance?

Universal TA. Data on universal TA are collected through real-time feedback from awardees and used to improve TA. For example, EDC holds monthly peer-to-peer calls with a “community of practice,” collects information at the end of each call, and uses the feedback as it structures the next call. EDC also relies on awardee evaluations to understand whether its universal TA is having its intended effect. When awardees meet their goals, they often say it was partly because of the TA they received.

Targeted TA. HRSA and EDC created an online TA tracking system to document requests for individual TA and capture its performance. The TA team uses the data system to produce monthly summary charts and graphs. If an awardee is not making progress, the TA team can review the awardee’s TA activities and identify any gaps. Staff review performance data regularly during team meetings to recognize any opportunities for improvement. HRSA also reviews performance data reported monthly by TA providers.

When targeted TA is provided through the HV CoIN, the TA team surveys awardees’ satisfaction with TA and monitors their overall progress toward shared SMART aims monthly to understand TA effectiveness and make midcourse corrections. One goal of this targeted TA is to help inform and improve the quality of the TA given to all awardees.

What lessons have been learned? These lessons from HRSA and EDC can inform other efforts to measure TA performance:

- **Develop leaders within the organization** (including frontline staff providing TA) who can articulate the importance of measuring TA performance and champion a culture of continuous learning.

- **Move away from using data to judge, and instead use data to improve.** Use data to inform ways that TA can improve over time instead of using them to identify deficiencies.
- **Engage diverse stakeholders in reviewing data.** Stakeholders offer unique views and can highlight gaps in thinking about what areas of performance to measure and why.
- **Develop a strong theory of change** with input from multiple stakeholders to provide a framework for measuring TA performance in a consistent and achievable way.
- **Use meaningful and realistic drivers** (the things that can help achieve the aim) **and performance measures.** TA providers must believe they can meet performance targets and influence drivers.
- **Balance having enough data to improve TA with placing a reasonable burden on staff and awardees.** Many things would be nice to know, but it is critical to be strategic and track only what will be used.
- **Get help from seasoned professionals** when needed. Early in the process, EDC brought in an expert on developing and operationalizing performance measures—a move EDC thought was critical to the overall success of the performance measurement effort.
- **Use performance data strategically and often.** EDC uses data in meetings with awardees, the TA team, key stakeholders, and leaders; and in reporting to HRSA.
- **Regularly and intentionally review the performance measurement approach** with new staff, and revisit it with existing staff.

For more information, visit

<https://mchb.hrsa.gov/maternal-child-health-initiatives/home-visiting/home-visiting-program-technical-assistance> .