

## Abridgment

# University-Sponsored Technical Assistance Strategy

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The technical assistance strategy of the Office of Statewide Transportation Programs, University of Wisconsin-Extension, is described. The program of university-based technical assistance is presented as part of an overall outreach effort that consists of four basic components: need-based educational programming, information transfer and sharing, training programs, and technical or community assistance. The goals of the technical assistance program are presented along with a brief discussion of the interrelations between technical assistance and the other three program components. Finally, three case studies are presented to demonstrate technical assistance in action. The major theme is that successful technical assistance demands a collaborative approach between university personnel and community representatives in solving transportation problems of importance to local citizens.

In 1976, the Office of Statewide Transportation Programs (OSTP) was established to address those transportation educational needs that were not being met by government or other University of Wisconsin-Extension programs. OSTP is housed in the Division of Urban Outreach, a unique entity within the university system because it is part of the University of Wisconsin-Extension and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. In order to provide a diversity of programs in transportation that are designed to meet the diverse needs found in the urban and rural communities in the state, OSTP personnel work closely with faculty and staff of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, through its Center for Urban Transportation Studies, and with faculty in other units of the university system, through the Urban Corridor Transportation Institute.

Although the functions of OSTP are many, this paper emphasizes the technical assistance component and its relation to the other outreach components of the program. For purposes of this paper, technical assistance is broadly defined as a two-step process:

1. The provision of information about technological changes that creates awareness and stimulates interest and
2. Adaptation, adoption, or demonstration of some transportation improvement.

## PHILOSOPHY OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The philosophy of OSTP is founded on the premise that very often the technical expertise of the university system can be applied to community transportation needs. In this approach, community needs are the focal point and the university serves as the broker in administering to those needs.

The technical assistance program is part of an overall outreach effort that consists of the following six basic principles and beliefs (1):

1. There is a fundamental relation between the university and the community of which it is a part. Communities benefit from increased educational opportunities and from the application of knowledge obtained through university technical assistance, training, and information transfer. The university benefits because its faculty and staff gain practical experience that is reflected in future outreach activities and traditional educational offerings.

2. Transfer of information, technical assistance, research, and education can best be accomplished when there is close communication between those who are faced with problems and those who have the capability to lend assistance in solving problems.

3. Historically, the university has been viewed as a leader in education and the creation of new knowledge. If the university is to remain at the cutting edge of relevant applied studies and thus meet the demands of a complex society, it must reach out into the community and play an active role in defining problems, in providing objective information for policy formulation, and in offering diverse, nontraditional educational activities and direct technical assistance.

4. Transportation outreach programs must be able to respond to current needs on a real-time basis. That is, the demand for technical assistance and/or information by practitioners and others is often immediate, and university personnel must respond quickly.

5. As is well known, some of the issues that arise in transportation are highly controversial, and dialog between opposing forces may be confined to formal processes such as public hearings. In these situations the university, unlike participating agencies, can provide a neutral environment within which effective, focused dialog can take place.

6. The lifeblood of a transportation outreach program involves recognition of the community as a very important resource, not only in terms of expertise but also in terms of needs identification. The development of transportation outreach programs demands a collaborative approach consisting of a genuine interchange of information between program planners and community representatives, and the program philosophy attempts to incorporate these viewpoints. This interchange ensures that the resulting programs--conferences, training programs, or technical assistance--meet the expressed needs of the community.

## ORGANIZATION OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE STRATEGY

Basically, the concept of technical assistance is viewed as an important part of the broader concept of community assistance through educational programming. Technical assistance is providing specialized information to address a specific problem on a one-to-one basis. However, our view of technical assistance is quite broad because it is integrated with other components of the transportation program and because we believe that the process of providing technical assistance starts with problem definition and clarification and proceeds to the direct application of the information generated through technical assistance efforts.

The overall transportation education program is based on four components: need-based educational programming, information transfer and sharing, training programs, and technical assistance. Each of these components is described below, and then the interrelations between technical assistance and the remaining components are presented.

### Need-Based Educational Programming

Need-based educational programming involves the planning, development, and implementation of educational programs such as conferences, workshops, and seminars. These are need-based because experience has demonstrated that specific problems such as

budget reductions for rural and specialized transportation and alternatives to rail abandonment are what is important to people. Transportation practitioners and other knowledgeable individuals are often consulted during the planning phase of a conference and very frequently participate directly. In addition, OSTP has an internal planning committee consisting of university faculty and staff. Each member keeps in touch with transportation developments in the community and the state within his or her area of interest and applies this knowledge by suggesting possible topics for future programs.

#### Information Transfer and Sharing

The dissemination of relevant up-to-date transportation information is a key ingredient in any program that involves education and technical assistance. This component consists of four basic parts: requests for information, information dissemination, the Transportation Briefs project, and availability of the Transportation Research Information System (TRIS). Requests for information are handled on a one-to-one basis. In most instances, the person who requests information is sent the appropriate reports. This is possible since OSTP, with cooperation from the Office of Technology Sharing of the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), serves as a statewide clearinghouse for research reports, manuals, and how-to publications.

Information dissemination consists of the information presented at conferences by transportation professionals as well as the distribution of written material on the topic being covered. Experience has demonstrated that distributing written reports in this manner is an effective means of information transfer. Visits to offices of regional planning agencies and county commissions on aging provide living proof that these reports are being used by planners and others to provide technical assistance in their communities.

The Transportation Briefs project, currently being implemented, is patterned after the Service and Methods Demonstration Briefs. However, the Transportation Briefs cover a wider range of topics, from public transit to rail transportation. The briefs are designed to provide useful but capsulized information on recent developments in transportation as well as information concerning contact persons and availability of publications. Recipients of the briefs include the county extension agents in all Wisconsin counties, the central and district offices of the state DOT, and the Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services. All individuals on the briefs mailing list are encouraged to provide feedback on the usefulness of the briefs as well as suggestions for future topics. This is in keeping with our belief that information transfer functions best when it is a two-way process.

The Center for Urban Transportation Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee maintains access to TRIS. OSTP, in cooperation with the center, promotes the use of this information source among transportation professionals at other campuses and at transportation agencies throughout the state.

#### Training Programs

One of the newest components of the transportation program is training. Within the past two years, training programs have been developed and offered in specialized transit driver training, passenger assistance techniques for drivers of specialized transit systems, quick-response methods for transit planning, and statistics for transportation engineers and planners. All of these programs were

developed in response to the expressed needs of a variety of individuals throughout the state. In addition, each program emphasizes specific skills and provides substantial hands-on experience for participants.

#### Technical Assistance

We view the concept of technical assistance to be an important part of the broader concept of community assistance. The primary reason for this view is that from the user point of view what constitutes technical assistance varies from person to person. The technical information provided to one person may be quite useful, whereas the same information may be general knowledge to another. Sometimes people need more than an independent, quick-response evaluation of their projects. Because our concept of technical assistance is broadly based, we are able to respond to a variety of requests.

The goals of the technical assistance component are

1. To offer technically sound, professional-quality applied research that responds to expressed transportation needs;
2. To apply the specialized talent of the university institutions to transportation problems and, when possible, to make this expertise available to agencies and groups within the state; and
3. To provide both professionals and citizens with up-to-date information on important topic areas such as public transit, specialized transit, goods movement, and transportation energy conservation through applied research and technical assistance activities.

Another example of technical assistance is the Urban Corridor Transportation Institute. In the fall of 1980, the University of Wisconsin-Extension established the institute by providing funds for the conduct of applied research projects in 14 southeastern Wisconsin counties (urban corridor). The universities at Green Bay, Milwaukee, Oshkosh, and Parkside participate in this program by conducting projects in their respective communities. The institute is administered through OSTP and serves as an extension of the technical assistance component. The institute is a mechanism that provides faculty the opportunity to work on transportation problems in their own communities. The administrators of the institute encourage collaborative efforts from both campus-based faculty and community-based personnel in designing an applied research project that will provide technical assistance that is timely and useful to the community.

The four components of the transportation program are interrelated, and it is these interrelations that form the basis of the technical assistance strategy. All four program components have two things in common: They rely on connections with people, and they deal with open communications concerning the transfer of information on transportation issues and problems. The technical assistance strategy capitalizes on these two simple commonalities in the following ways:

1. Need-based educational programs (e.g., conferences) provide specialized information to people on specific topics. Conference attendees, through the course of a conference, provide us with specific information on their transportation-related problems and, hence, their technical assistance needs.
2. Information transfer and sharing also provide specialized information to people on request. It is important to note that, in order to be effective,

information transfer and sharing must be open.

3. At first glance, training programs appear to have little to do with technical assistance. However, this component is a form of technical assistance and has been quite useful in providing us with information on technical assistance needs not directly related to training.

4. The Urban Corridor Transportation Institute was established, in part, to address the technical assistance needs of urban and rural communities in the southeastern Wisconsin region. Faculty work cooperatively with appropriate agency personnel to refine and mold the projects to meet local needs.

5. The technical assistance component itself is used to develop connections with people throughout the state and to make available specialized information tailored to individual community needs. The fundamental rule governing our direct involvement in technical assistance is that there must be an expressed need for such assistance. Our overall program of transportation education is designed to help people recognize and articulate their technical assistance needs. Sometimes this strategy leads to specific requests for technical assistance and sometimes it does not, but it does require that local agency representatives take the initiative to recognize their own need for technical assistance and to do something about it.

#### TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE IN ACTION

The following examples help to illustrate how the words describing philosophy, strategy, and organization are turned into action regarding technical assistance.

##### Case Study 1

Case study 1 was done in the summer of 1979. Transportation issues were raised in the state through governmental statewide questionnaires, hearings, and other public forums. Section 18 (Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964, as amended) was new, and states were being asked to participate in the program. The need in this case was to provide some educational sessions for the residents of Wisconsin that would (a) educate by providing current and practical information, (b) promote local dialog concerning transportation issues, and (c) minimize barriers that deny program participation and therefore reduce mobility.

The Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services, the Wisconsin DOT, and OSTP cosponsored 5 one-day workshops around the state. The subjects covered were (a) transportation funding, (b) revision of school bus law, (c) insurance, (d) driver training, (e) coordination, (f) statewide needs assessment, and (g) outreach assistance available in the community. The workshops were well attended and provided the public with information that was developed into programs of their own.

##### Case Study 2

Case study 2 was done in the winter of 1979. Many

volunteer drivers providing human service transportation have encountered insurance problems. In many cases, the personal automobile policy limits were not adequate to protect against potential liability losses. Some agencies did not have adequate insurance coverage. The need in this case was to provide information regarding a new coverage under the category "social-service-agency automobile" and provide instruction in evaluating pertinent insurance programs.

The Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services, the State Insurance Commissioner's Office, the Association of Volunteer Coordinators, and OSTP published an OSTP newsletter covering two topics: (a) Excess Liability Coverage for Auto Insurance and (b) New Classification--Social Service Agency Automobile. The result of this action made available a special classification of liability insurance that counties have purchased to provide further protection for volunteer drivers.

##### Case Study 3

Case study 3 was done in the fall of 1980. The Milwaukee County Institutions Grounds contain health care and social service facilities for the county. The daytime population is in excess of 16 000 people. This concentration of people has created traffic and parking problems. The need in this case was to provide a study that would define the problems and make recommendations for their solution.

OSTP was asked by the Milwaukee County Institutions Department of Administration to investigate the feasibility of instituting major ridesharing programs for employees. OSTP, together with the Center for Urban Transportation Studies, used students to conduct the study and develop a final report. This effort combined applied research with practical application to provide recommendations that proved feasible and implementable.

#### SUMMARY

The technical assistance strategy of the University of Wisconsin-Extension OSTP is based on principles that are relatively easy to implement. Since technical assistance has an important place in all components of the program, the opportunities to provide such assistance are thereby increased. Through a comprehensive program of transportation education, it is possible to assist people in recognizing and articulating their technical assistance needs. It is truly remarkable to observe the progress some transportation agency people have made in this respect over the past few years. This, coupled with their feedback concerning the usefulness of our program, provides sufficient evidence that the broad-based strategy actually works.

#### REFERENCE

1. R.P. Schmitt, E.A. Beimborn, D.J. Cyra, and A.J. Horowitz. Role of Outreach Activities in Transportation Education. *TRB, Transportation Research Record* 793, 1981, pp. 21-25.