

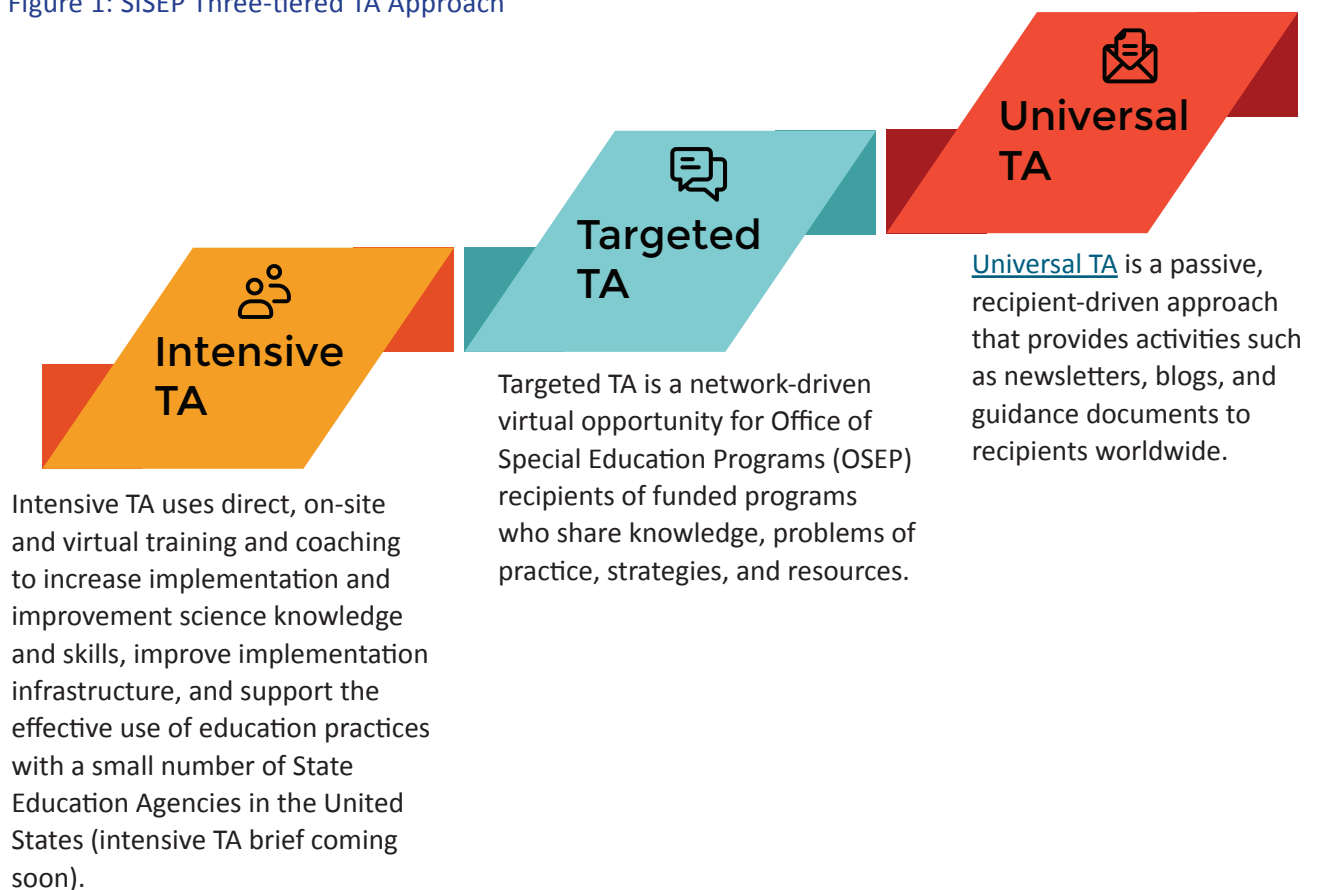
Technical Assistance in Action Brief: Targeted TA

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Introduction

In the complex landscape of educational reform, successful implementation demands more than just occasional guidance. It requires a relevant, structured support system responsive to the needs of those implementing identified evidence-based practices. The State Implementation and Scaling-up of Evidence-based Practices (SISEP) Center meets this need with a robust, three-tiered model for technical assistance (TA): universal, targeted, and intensive (see Figure 1). This system ensures all partners receive the appropriate level of support exactly when and where they need it. Our Technical Assistance in Action Briefs provide specific information on how the SISEP Center delivers the three-tiered TA Model.

Figure 1: SISEP Three-tiered TA Approach



This brief will explore the SISEP targeted TA model. We will describe and provide concrete examples of how our partners are leveraging this focused, mid-level support to develop a sustainable infrastructure for scaling their evidence-based practices.

Targeted Technical Assistance Definition and Research

SISEP's targeted TA is strategically implemented to advance the selection, adoption, and sustained use of our partners' evidence-based practices (EBPs) while leveraging Implementation and Improvement Science research. Targeted technical assistance (TA) provides structured learning opportunities for groups of educational agencies working on similar implementation challenges. Unlike universal TA, which broadly shares resources, and intensive TA, which offers individualized, sustained support, targeted TA uses peer-to-peer networks where participants in similar roles exchange strategies, experiences, and resources to strengthen workforce capacity and improve outcomes for students with disabilities.

OSERS (2018) defines targeted TA as "targeted, specialized TA" service that is "based on needs common to multiple recipients. Service is not extensively individualized. Rather, a relationship is established between the TA recipients and one or more project staff. Targeted TA includes one-time, labor-intensive events, such as facilitating strategic planning or hosting regional or national conferences. It can also include episodic, less labor-intensive events that span a period of time, such as facilitating a series of conference calls on single or multiple topics that are designed around the needs of the recipients."

The fundamental principle of the SISEP Center's targeted TA is that it must be relevant and highly tailored to the unique needs of our recipients (Scott, Chagnon, & Wandersman, 2024).

Our targeted TA distinguishes itself through the following operational features:



Format and Duration: It takes place off-site and is designed to be short-term and time-limited, such as a virtual Community of Practice series.



Participant Engagement: Participants engage in shared learning activities, including hands-on training, access to curated resources, and review of shared artifacts, tools, and strategies.



Resources: Collaborative partnerships utilize the [Active Implementation Hub \(AI Hub\)](#) as the foundational resource.



Outcome Focus: Every session is designed to foster collaboration aimed at closing the research to practice gap by removing implementation barriers and sharing the successes inherent in systems change.

Communities of Practice as a Viable Targeted TA Approach

OSERS (2018) identifies Communities of Practice (CoPs) as targeted, specialized TA. At SISEP, we use this form of specialized TA to deliver high-impact, contextually relevant content to actively engage participants. Additionally, Buysse, Sparkman, & Wesley (2003) define the CoP as an organizational and conceptual framework primarily aimed at integrating educational research and professional practice for continuous improvement. It is a social process in which a group of people shares a common concern, set of problems, or passion for a topic to deepen their knowledge and expertise on an ongoing basis (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002).

Using a CoP model, the SISEP Center designs and delivers targeted TA to create networks that provide opportunities for participants to share knowledge, strategies, and resources around the use of implementation and improvement science. The literature on Communities of Practice suggests two key concepts are foundational when designing a CoP.

1. Learning is situated in the context of the users and is not an isolated or individual activity. Rather, it draws from the experience and interactions within the community.
2. Practice is reflective as the community creates new knowledge. It is based on the assumption that knowledge is derived from a blend of formal knowledge gained through theory and research, and participants' own lived experience and observations in their field.

The structure of CoPs is typically a balance of informal interaction and structured shared learning. Three essential components distinguish them from workgroups.

1. Shared area of interest that gives the community a collective identity.
2. A community social structure that facilitates collaboration, sharing, mutual engagement, and contribution to a mutual field of interest.
3. Practice or a compilation of shared resources, tools, ideas, and stories that can be shared with the broader community to advance learning.

Leveraging Targeted TA Practice

Lessons from targeted TA practice are critical inputs used to share and refine SISEP's universal and intensive resources and services. Our targeted TA partners inform us of resources that would be helpful to their work, often requesting examples of use in practice. They bring our attention to the importance of sharing specific resources via social media and educating them regarding resources available through universal TA. For example, a partner recently shared that they were not familiar with NIRN's Implementation Support Practitioner Practice Profile and Interactive Lessons to support their search for soft-skill training, like growing and sustaining relationships, tailoring support, and cultivating leaders. This alerted us to ensure universal TA resources are shared and explicitly described in targeted TA training. Through the process of targeted TA, our partners also learn about the opportunity and requirements to receive intensive TA as an active SISEP state. This targeted approach is central to meeting our overarching goal: to support the development of a skilled educator workforce to advance student learning, and to strengthen cross-agency coordination and community engagement, which is essential to achieving systemic change.

Institutes of Higher Education (IHE) Community of Practice

The IHE CoP is a collaborative network focused on advancing the teaching, sharing, and application of implementation science (IS) principles and research within courses of study for aspiring education leaders.

Year 1: Foundational Launch and Dissemination

Launched in 2024, the IHE CoP initially engaged four universities: Portland State University, the University of Delaware, the University of North Dakota, and the University of Washington. The primary goal of year 1 was to build foundational implementation science knowledge with the objective to increase opportunities for IHE participants to integrate implementation science research and practice activities into one course syllabi within their Educational Leadership and Doctor of Education Programs.

Participants met in six virtual CoP sessions to co-develop instructional approaches, review course syllabi, and explore how implementation science resources from the Active Implementation Hub could be embedded in existing coursework. The work and early progress of the CoP were shared through a poster presentation at the 2024 OSEP Leadership Conference entitled, "[Fostering Collaboration through Communities of Practice: Implementation Science and IHE Leadership.](#)"

Evaluation data from session surveys and follow-up interviews highlighted the value of peer collaboration, practical strategies for integrating implementation science into coursework, and increased understanding of how implementation science connects action research and dissertation work. Feedback also informed improvements for year 2, including additional collaboration time and the introduction of pre-learning materials between meetings.

A Timeline of Activities, Impact, and Evolution

Year 1: Foundational Launch and Dissemination (2023-24)

GOAL

Build foundational implementation science (IS) knowledge

METHODS & ACTIVITIES

- Six virtual CoP sessions
- Co-develop instructional design & delivery (sample course syllabi)
- Syllabi review

DISSEMINATION

Poster at OSEP Leadership Conference

EVALUATION

Year 2 improvements

- More collaboration time
- Adding pre-learning

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK AND IMPACT:

Sharing & Collaboration

Heard peer challenges and lessons learned

Sustained Integration

IS in Ed D. curricula, micro-credential program

Effective Use

Tangible, immediately applicable IS activities

Increased Knowledge

Strengthened IS action research links

Year 2: Co-Creation and Dissemination

Three additional IHEs joined in year 2: the University of Arizona, the University of Utah, and Utah State University. During the first two sessions, SISEP implementation specialists facilitated a [Purpose-to-Product \(PtP\)](#) co-creation process using Liberating Structures. IHEs outlined the features, benefits, and purpose of their CoP to guide their work.

Figure 2: Purpose to Product



Participants collaboratively defined the purpose with a clear focus on the principle of bridging the research-to-practice gap, asserting that implementation science is the mechanism for achieving this. Key refinements include:

- **Closing the Gap:** Bridge the knowing and doing gap.
- **Intentionality:** Being intentional about the selection, onboarding, and de-selection of initiatives.
- **District Support:** Building foundational knowledge to support partner districts.
- **Decision-Making:** Creating the conditions to assess what is/isn't working, and support strategic decisions focused on improving outcomes.
- **Systemic Reach:** Take the information from micro-credentialing and NIRN to other offices within our educational agencies.
- **Every Student:** Having a process where each and every student has access and opportunity.

Additionally, progress and lessons learned were disseminated through a SISEP blog post published in January of 2025, highlighting how IHEs are preparing a skilled educational workforce and helping close the research-to-practice gap through the CoP. Evaluation of the sessions was also conducted to inform plans for year 3. The surveys and interviews emphasized the value of increased time for

Year 2: Co-Creation and Dissemination (2024-25)

GOAL

Co-creation and dissemination

METHODS & ACTIVITIES

- Six virtual CoP sessions
- Closing the knowing-doing gap
- District support
- Strategic decision-making
- Purpose-to-product (i.e. liberating structures method)
- Intentionality in initiatives
- Systemic Reach

DISSEMINATION

SISEP Blog, January 2025

EVALUATION

New features

- Student micro-credential program
- Increased collaboration

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK AND IMPACT:

Sharing & Collaboration

Valuable discussions about embedding IS in coursework

Sustained Integration

Program wide IS practices shared

Effective Use

Developed/adapted fidelity tools for courses

Increased Knowledge

Benefit from peer feedback & case sharing. Excited to learn AIF Pathways

collaboration and opportunities to share institutional practices. Participants also gained the opportunity to provide cohort students access to the Implementation Support Practitioner Micro-credentialing program. Feedback highlighted the value of peer discussion, practical strategies for embedding implementation science into coursework, development of fidelity tools, and a deeper understanding of implementation stages and action research.

Year 3: Going Deeper to Close the Research to Practice Gap

At the year 3 kick-off session, participants were asked how they wanted our time together to be structured. Participants outlined four major needs that drove the structure of the 2025-26 CoP sessions, emphasizing content delivery, sharing of practice, and shared learning:

1. **Soft Skills Integration:** Guidance on how to better teach and integrate Implementation Support Practitioner Competencies (soft skills) into existing coursework, acknowledging that these skills are difficult to develop and take time.
2. **Resource Sharing:** Opportunities to share syllabi and favorite tools used for teaching/training, especially related to the Active Implementation Frameworks (AIFs).
3. **Case Study Learning:** Strategies to make content more accessible for doctoral students by using case studies. This includes:
 - Developing case studies that illustrate successful and unsuccessful implementation.
 - Providing prompts to analyze case studies through various lenses (e.g., policy, research, practice).
 - Developing discussion prompts paired with specific areas of focus.
4. **Failure Analysis:** Opportunities to share and learn from things that did not work.

In year 3, examples of how IHEs integrated implementation science into course syllabi will be shared publicly through SISEP blogs, webinars, and social media. Evaluation findings will also be summarized and included in the end-of-year dissemination. In CoP evaluations, participants reported strong value in learning from peers across the country, sharing resources and challenges, discovering new SISEP tools, and gaining ideas for embedding IS, such as teaming structures, into their programs.

Year 3: Going Deeper to Close the Research to Practice Gap (2025- 2026)

GOAL

Going deeper to integrate the Implementation Support Practitioner Competencies

METHODS & ACTIVITIES

- Six virtual CoP sessions
- Soft skills integration
- Resource sharing
- Case study learning
- Failure analysis

DISSEMINATION

Public sharing of IS integration in syllabi through blogs, webinars, Facebook, and LinkedIn.

EVALUATION

End-of-year data sharing

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK AND IMPACT:

Sharing & Collaboration

National resource sharing- even on 'not yet figured out' ideas

Sustained Integration

Learning program embedding approaches from peers

Effective Use

Directed to new SISEP resources

Increased Knowledge

Appreciated pre-session articles and tools

Advancing Implementation Expertise through Communities of Practice

The SISEP-supported IHE Community of Practice (CoP) successfully transitioned from a foundational launch in year 1 (2023-24) to a highly collaborative, product-focused co-creation phase in year 2 (2024-25). In year 3 (2025-26), a participant-driven, participant-owned process is underway that will produce tangible examples of how to integrate implementation science into course syllabi and spread its use across other IHE departments. This network, which grew from four to seven universities, has proven effective in advancing the teaching and application of IS principles within aspiring education leadership programs.

Key takeaways include:



Sustained Impact: Participants immediately integrated IS into their Ed.D. curricula, dissertations, and program structures, demonstrating the CoP's direct, tangible value in increasing knowledge and practical application.



Refined Purpose: The collaborative Purpose-to-Product (PoP) process led to a clear, actionable purpose focused on bridging the research-to-practice gap, using IS as the essential mechanism.



Driving Future Structure: Feedback from members clearly articulates the need for deeper content delivery focused on practical resources and teaching methodologies. The requests for the integration of soft skills (Implementation Support Practitioner Competencies), the sharing of AIF-related tools and syllabi, structured case-study learning, and failure analysis will critically guide the CoP's future structure to better equip doctoral students for real-world implementation challenges.

In summary, the IHE CoP is a dynamic, participant-driven network that is effectively integrating IS research and practice into course syllabi. This effort will build the workforce of future education leaders who use IS to support colleagues, leaders, and partner districts who ultimately create the conditions necessary for every student to have access and opportunities, especially students with disabilities.

Designing Effective Targeted TA using the CoP Model

How can you replicate the SISEP approach in your targeted assistance and communities of practice? Take a look at these four basic steps to get started.

Build Capacity to Sustain Change from Day One. Develop knowledge and skills of recipients to strategically use IS practice and research.

- Support recipients in using their chosen Evidence-Based Practices.
- Leverage organizational strengths to maintain lasting systems change.

Provide Strategic and Personalized Support. Tailor all support to the unique needs of the recipients, ensuring the support is deployed where and when it is needed most.

- Advance the selection, adoption, and sustained use of a partner’s EBPs.
- Foster collaboration aimed at solving specific Problems of Practice inherent in systems change.

Strengthen the Educational Environment. Strengthen systems to bolster educator capacity and enhance outcomes for all students, particularly those with disabilities.

- Advance student learning by building a skilled educator workforce.
- Build cross-agency coordination and community engagement, which are essential for achieving systemic change.

Provide Direct Support via Active Implementation.

- Use the Active Implementation Hub (AI Hub) as the foundational resource to close the research-to-practice gap.
- Recognize the need for recipients to personalize their learning according to their specific implementation needs.
- Empower partners to extend their learning through use of SISEP Learner Pathways.
 - Active Implementation Formula Learner Pathway
 - Implementation Support Practitioner Core Competencies Learner Pathway

Resources

[IHE Purpose to Product](#)

Poster: [Fostering Collaboration through Communities of Practice: Implementation Science and IHE Leadership](#)

Blog: [How to Prepare a Skilled Educational Workforce: Institutes of Higher Education \(IHE\) Closing the Research-to-Practice Gap in a Community of Practice \(CoP\)](#)

[Active Implementation Formula Learner Pathway](#)

[Implementation Support Practitioner Core Competencies Learner Pathway](#)

[SISEP Universal TA Brief](#) and [Webinar](#)

SISEP Communication Channels:

- [SISEP Implementation for Educators Blog](#)
- [SISEP & NIRN Videos](#)
- [SISEP on Facebook](#)
- [SISEP on LinkedIn](#)

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