SISEP
State Implementation and Scaling-up of Evidence-based Practices

# Technical Assistance in Action Brief

## Universal Technical Assistance

**Kris Earl, Ed.D. & Rebekah Hornak**

## Introduction

**Technical assistance (TA) is a term used to describe efforts provided to an individual or organization to support capacity development (Katz & Wandersman, 2016; West et al, 2012) to promote the adoption of evidence-based practices or affect systems change (Dunst et al., 2019). This capacity development can focus on developing knowledge and skills to improve performance quality, effectiveness, and efficiency (West et al., 2012). The intensity and types of TA can be tailored according to the needs and desired outcomes of the recipient.**

The State Implementation and Scaling-up of Evidence-based Practices (SISEP) Center is funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and is a project of the National Implementation Research Network. SISEP uses a differentiated three-tiered approach to support states in developing an infrastructure for implementing and scaling evidence-based practices, including universal, targeted, and intensive TA.

Figure 1: Three-tiered TA Support


Technical assistance is provided in support of SISEP's goal to expand the selection, adoption, and sustained use of evidence-based practices using implementation science to strengthen educational systems, support educators, and improve outcomes for all students, especially for students with disabilities. Lessons learned from intensive and targeted TA are used to inform and refine the universal TA services. OSEP defines universal TA as "passive" in that information is provided to independent users through their initiative with minimal direct interaction from the TA center staff. Universal TA activities include providing information or products such as newsletters, guidance documents, and research briefs that can be downloaded from a website or brief communication through telephone, email, or one-time invitations to conferences or workshops. Using OSEP's definition, the universal TA provided by SISEP includes disseminating educational materials and resources, with dissemination and communication occurring through the

Center's website, newsletters, and other communication means, such as social media and professional presentations. Implementation materials and resources are available through an online learning platform, the Active Implementation Hub (AI Hub).

## SISEP's Approach to Universal TA

Universal TA is a critical component of SISEP's tiered TA approach. A key distinction that defines universal TA from targeted and intensive TA is that universal TA is recipient-driven, meaning an individual or group can explore and engage with content and resources rather than joining into a collaborative partnership with SISEP as they would for targeted and intensive TA.

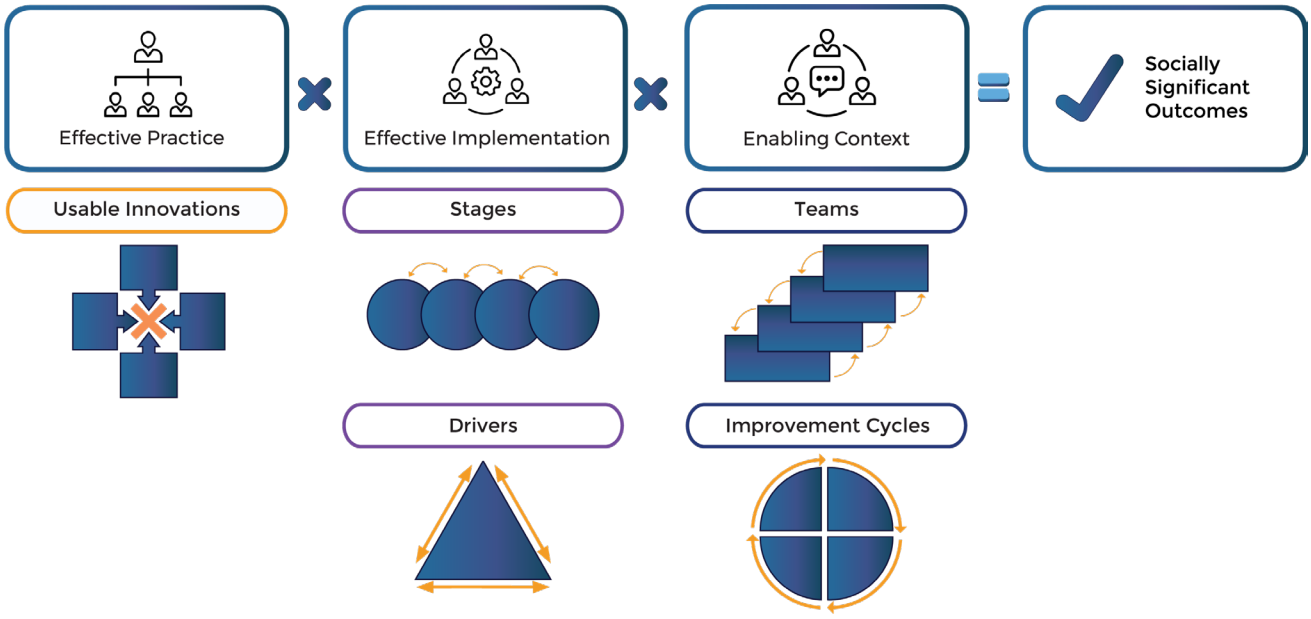
Information and resources can be accessed independently. Universal TA is an efficient means to disseminate learning and practices, providing learning resources, activities, tools, and examples from practice. Universal TA can effectively support a recipient in building foundational knowledge and provide resources and learning material so those who possess foundational knowledge can dig deeper into learning content. Universal TA, however, has limitations such as not being customized to the unique needs of the individual or organization, nor tailored to account for the context in which implementation occurs. While universal TA is not meant to replace targeted and intensive technical assistance, it can support these more intensive levels through individual learning and the application of resources.

SISEP aims to support the development of the educator workforce to advance student learning and strengthen cross-agency coordination and community engagement for implementation. To accomplish this, SISEP strives to develop the competency of leaders and educators as implementation specialists. Universal TA is provided to all interested leaders, educators, and OSEP TA providers by disseminating the Center's products and services based on the learnings gained through intensive and targeted TA efforts. SISEP utilizes various dissemination methods to communicate and engage with recipients, including the Center's website, social media, and networking and learning platforms. Together, they provide relevant information, recommendations, implementation practice guidance, and implications for further research and implementation approaches. To support the growing field of implementation science, SISEP produces short educational blogs and briefs on implementation topics and issues for use as communication tools and

learning resources. SISEP also creates white papers to illustrate implementation work through case studies and other data stories.

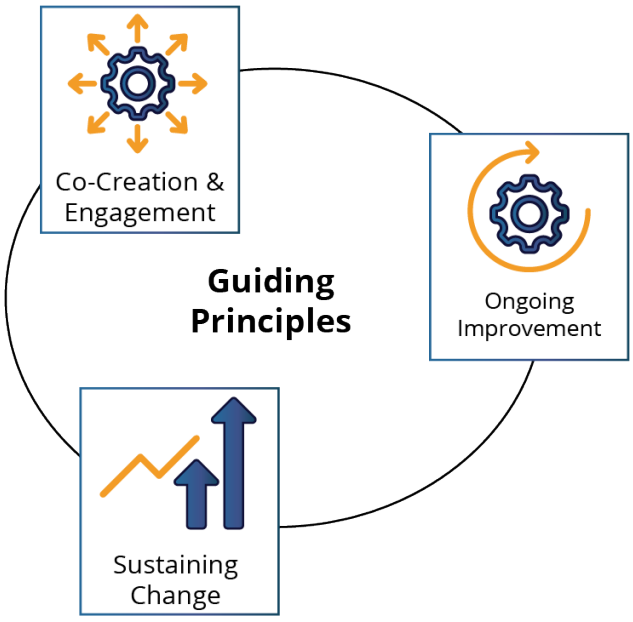
Through SISEP's dissemination efforts, linkage is made to the Active Implementation (AI) Hub, NIRN's publicly available online learning platform, which supports learning and using tools and resources. The AI Hub is a free, interactive learning environment offering over 200 experiential learning activities, tools, and resources for any interested user. The AI Hub provides a wealth of resources, from learning lessons to practical tools and guides, all derived from rigorous research to support effective implementation and drive continuous improvement. The AI Hub aims to develop and increase individuals' and organizations' knowledge and performance of implementation practices. Content on the AI Hub has been developed around the Active Implementation Formula (Fixsen et al., 2005)—the essential components necessary to implement a program or practice effectively, and the five overarching frameworks that define the key ingredients needed within the formula to achieve socially significant outcomes.

Figure 2: Active Implementation Formula




The AI Hub also has content dedicated to the development of Implementation Support Practitioners. Implementation Support Practitioners are an essential component of active implementation, working to facilitate and support organizations to effectively develop implementation processes and build capacity to sustain and scale practices. Recipients can access the Implementation Support Practitioner Practice Profile (Metz et al., 2020), which outlines the skills and competencies implementation support specialists need to support effective implementation. It also includes a practice guide and interactive lessons with embedded resources to support the development and capacity of practitioners.

Figure 3: Implementation Support Practitioner Core Competencies




With the many resources available on the AI Hub, Active Implementation Learner Pathways and Implementation Support Practitioner Core Competencies Learner Pathway are accessible to support a universal TA recipient's engagement with learning activities and resources. Each Learner Pathway provides a detailed sequence of learning lessons, tools, and experiential learning activities to support a recipient in progressively gaining the necessary knowledge, skills, and competencies to implement evidence-based practices in real-world settings.

The Pathways allow the recipient to choose the best course, allowing for personalized learning according to their implementation needs and current context (Crosslin, 2021). Developed as a detailed learning sequence, the Learner Pathways can support the development of foundational knowledge and skills for implementation and progressively build skills for application. Recipients who access the AI Hub with some experience with implementation science can use the Learner Pathways to examine their current knowledge and skills to identify potential gaps, providing tools and resources to support deeper learning and application.

## SISEP's Universal Techinical Assistance Plan and Impact

Since the publication of its first brief in 2013, the SISEP Center has had a long history of providing implementation practice support in K-12 education. Since this initial brief, Scaling Up Evidence-based Practices in Education, the SISEP Center has provided the education field with 15 briefs, multiple white papers, 200+ tools and resources on the Active Implementation Hub, and countless collaborations with educational agencies. However, the question remains: **To what effect or impact does this form of universal technical assistance have?**

To examine this, the SISEP Center developed a detailed dissemination plan with specific measurements, including passive and active dissemination efforts. The SISEP Center team uses data pulled from the listed indicators of success to evaluate the plan's effectiveness. The SISEP team identifies and applies iterative improvement cycles to address challenges and make improvements. Data and recommended improvements are shared with the Program Officer for input and shared decision-making.

One example of decision-making based on dissemination data included the SISEP Center's use of the X platform. The SISEP Center decided to leave the X platform (formerly known as Twitter) after analyzing engagement and follower data, which showed a decline in participation from its target audiences and limited authentic interaction. This decision was made in consultation with the Program Officer. In response, the SISEP Center has shifted its communication strategy to focus on LinkedIn for engaging professionals and Facebook for connecting with broader audiences and partners to improve targeted engagement.

The SISEP Center's initial data review in the summer of 2024 indicated over 113,089 users accessed the AI Hub as part of universal TA, engaging with the site 232,162 times and downloading resources 103,025 times since Sept 1, 2022. Other dissemination activities included: a monthly eNote newsletter, with an open rate of 46% (above industry standards of 20%); 15 SISEP blogs, with 9,438 reads; four briefs with a download range from 18 to 765, and with associated webinar recordings viewed 248 to 506 times; and YouTube channel content with 47,564 views, of which the top three videos were the Active Implementation Formula Overview, Implementation Stages, and Improvement Cycles. In addition, the six additional interactive lessons created by SISEP were viewed by users more than 1000 times for the first lesson posted in November 2022 and more than 50 times for the last lesson posted in November 2023. Since September 2022, 7,127 users have accessed the 16 interactive lessons/short courses on the AI Hub.

## OUR REACH

**113,089**
Website Users

**103,025**
Downloads

**232,162**
Website Sessions*

*Website sessions refer to the period of time a user is active on website

## UNIVERSAL TA

**21**
Modules

**7**
New Lessons

**4**
Briefs

**15**
SISEP blog posts → **9,438**
Reads

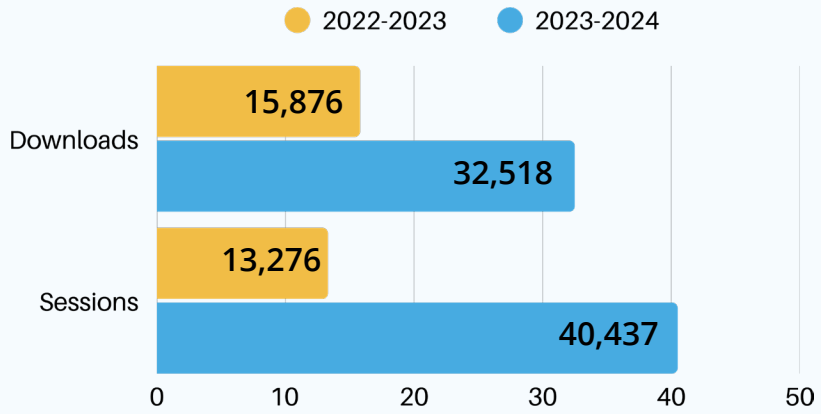
## YOUTUBE CHANNEL


**Top Three Videos**

| | |
|---|---|
| Active Implementation Formula Overview Video | 7,488 Views |
| Implementation Stages Overview Video | 5,098 Views |
| Improvement Cycles Overview Video | 3,756 Views |

Developing interactive lessons for the Active Implementation Hub involves creating engaging, user-centered content that helps users understand and apply the Active Implementation Frameworks (AIFs) and the Implementation Support Practitioner (ISP) Core Competencies. These lessons incorporate real-world scenarios and interactive components like quizzes, case studies, and guided exercises to reinforce key concepts, such as the importance of fidelity, capacity building, and sustainability in implementation. The goal is to ensure that users—district leaders, teachers, or other target audiences—can actively engage with the material, reflect on their practices, and apply what they learn in their unique contexts.

Between Sept 2022 and July 2023, 83,561 users accessed the AI Hub, with 29,528 more joining from Aug 2023 to April 2024. Downloads increased significantly, from 15,876 to 32,518, and sessions grew from 13,276 to 40,437 during the same period. Additional insights have come from satisfaction data, including open-ended comments from surveys and focus groups.




When respondents were asked about the AI Hub in April 2023, they described it as

**"organized," "engaging," and "easy to access and use" and praised the "relatable examples."**

They also suggested adding more guidance for those new to implementation science, providing additional examples, and reducing the use of technical jargon. After the AI Hub Survey was re-administered in December 2023, following updates made to the AI Hub by the Center, respondents shared positive feedback such as, "the reorganization makes the Hub efficient, easy to navigate, and searchable," "keep using practitioner-friendly language," and "continue to include real-life examples that translate abstract concepts into actionable steps." While this initial evaluation is trending in the right direction, the SISEP Center team continues to examine the quality of the resources and the examples provided.

# Lessons Learned and Next Steps

To ensure intentional and responsive communication, the SISEP Center engages in proactive annual planning for content creation and dissemination based on our lessons learned from the data. Yearly planning for content development and dissemination occurs each summer, leading into the next year of the project. The SISEP Center team examines feedback from all activity participants to identify topics for the various universal outputs. The schedule for the eNotes and blogs—including topics, lead authors, and co-authors—is defined each year as part of the planning. The eNote subscription campaign will be reexamined to meet the annual 5% increase, and additional content development for the required briefs, videos, and podcasts will be co-designed by the team and partners identified. The capacity for social media posting will be reexamined. The AI Hub team will continue to meet once a month to examine resources to add and continue iterative improvement cycles of interactive lessons.

Another element critical to the success of the SISEP Center's TA approach is involving partners from the conception of the content. Including partners and critical perspectives in developing content and dissemination efforts is essential for ensuring that the resources and materials produced are relevant, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of the Center's target audience. By engaging partners from various sectors—such as state, regional, and district levels—during the design phase, the content can reflect multiple experiences and insights, enhancing its practicality and impact. Throughout the dissemination process, continuous collaboration with partners ensures that the messages are communicated effectively, and feedback allows for continuous improvement. This approach fosters a sense of ownership and shared responsibility, increasing the likelihood of successful adoption and sustained impact (Scott et al., 2024).

## Benefit from our Universal TA

If you are interested in benefiting from the SISEP Center's universal TA, take a moment to complete the following actions:

- Subscribe to our Newsletter
- Subscribe to our YouTube Channel
- Follow us on LinkedIn & Facebook

We also recommend taking some time to evaluate your dissemination efforts. Take a look at your data. What is it telling you about your target audience? How can you improve your efforts and create an effective plan?

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## About SISEP

Effective implementation capacity is essential to improving education. The State Implementation & Scaling-up of Evidence-based Practices Center supports education systems in creating implementation capacity for evidence-based practices benefitting students, especially those with disabilities. For more Information visit us on the web at: https://sisep.fpg.unc.edu/


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For further information:
Kris Earl: krisearl@email.unc.edu
Rebekah Hornak: rebekah.hornak@unc.edu
State Implementation & Scaling-up of Evidence-based Practices, or visit https://sisep.fpg.unc.edu/