

RCI



Rebuilding Communities Initiative

Cross-Site/Local Technical Assistance Strategy Capacity Building Phase

Over the past several months, numerous discussions with RCI sites and foundation personnel have taken place in order to shape a technical assistance strategy for the capacity building phase of RCI. On July 10-11, at a special meeting held in Baltimore, and at an RCI team meeting on July 30, a draft outline of this strategy was further refined by a group of RCI participants, Local and National TA providers and AECF staff. The following is an outline of the strategy which has emerged. This strategy will be used as a framework to guide all cross site and local technical assistance associated with RCI during the capacity building phase.

I. The Guiding Principals for Technical Assistance in RCI

The TA strategy is based on a number of guiding principals developing jointly by the foundation, the RCI sites and the TA team:

1. TA is as important a resource in the initiative as grant dollars. Both the foundation and the sites need to draw upon the knowledge, experience and expertise of others and of one another in order to be effective in this challenging and groundbreaking work. TA in both the substance and the process of community building are critical to the success of RCI.
2. TA activities are intended to benefit the entire community -- some people and organizations directly -- others indirectly. Funds that AECF provides directly for TA are meant to be expended for TA to individuals and organizations including -- but not limited to -- the grantee.
3. The Foundation brings to the initiative certain values knowledge, strategies and

assumptions -- imbedded in the critical elements of RCI -- which they believe are necessary for effective planning and implementation of the initiative. Over the course of the initiative AECF will provide core TA across the five sites to keep these ideals and strategies at the forefront of the community building efforts. AECF are committed to doing whatever possible to ensure that these ideals and strategies are clear and pragmatic.

4. All TA must be appropriate to the local community. Every effort will be made to ensure that there is a good fit between TA providers and recipients.
5. Every effort will be made to ensure that the TA provided is of exceptional quality and is responsive to the specific needs, conditions, character and priorities of the community.
6. This initiative places a high priority on developing local capacity to provide TA in areas relevant to RCI. One of the important outcomes of RCI will be to build a local cadre of people and organizations in each RCI site that can be a sustained sources of TA support for community building.
7. This initiative places a high value on peer learning. Throughout the initiative, we will look for opportunities to have TA provided by others engaged in various aspects of community building-- including the RCI sites themselves.
8. Effective management of TA is one of the capacities which communities should develop through RCI. Each of the participating communities will have a proactive role in identifying TA needs, establishing priorities for TA, developing TA strategies and managing TA providers.
9. The TA approach needs to be grounded in a coherent "model" of institutional and community change which RCI is trying to achieve. Both the sites and the foundation are in the process -- through RCI -- of testing and discovering these theories of change. This is a process of comparing the theoretical assumptions of RCI with the experiences in the sites. One function of TA in RCI will be to ensure that this process takes place. Honest dialogue is essential to this learning process and must be a core ingredient in cross-site gatherings.
10. Technical Assistance needs to be a) of high quality, and c) accountable to both the sites and the foundation. Moreover, it must be delivered in a manner which respects the time, commitment, energy and capacity of the communities to which it is invited.

II. The Technical Assistance Strategy

The TA Strategy will have two principal components; A) a Cross Site Technical Assistance Effort, and B) a Local TA Strategy.

A. Cross-Site Technical Assistance

1. Background

RCI is more than a collection of individual sites struggling to improve their communities. It is an initiative which hopes to advance the learning in the field by defining and demonstrating a theory of community change. With that, the hope is that RCI can impact the practice and funding of community building efforts in the United States, and influence local, regional, state and national policy related to building better communities for families and children. As we have discussed, it is therefore essential that all parties involved in RCI (AECF staff, local and national TA providers, and RCI Sites) work collectively to ensure the success of the initiative.

In the capacity building phase, this work must take the form of collective learning -- making RCI a "learning initiative" for all parties involved so that the experiences and lessons of the sites, the foundation and the TA providers can be captured and integrated into the work.

For this reason, a major emphasis in the capacity building phase will be on providing a program of Cross-Site TA which engages all three parties in a collective learning process.

2. The Cross-Site TA Team

Cross Site TA will be carried out by a small team of nationally renowned providers. The Goals for the Cross-Site TA Team in the Capacity Building Phase are to:

- Establish a forum for honest dialogue and learning among the sites and the foundation by challenging both to be clear and ambitious
- Assist sites in making significant progress on the core elements of the initiative
- Provide support and linkages to other local and national TA resources

The Cross-Site TA Team will be led by Neighborhood Partners which will serve as the overall TA Coordinator for the Initiative. Neighborhood Partners will be assisted in the Core Team by The Management Assistance Group (MAG). The Team will play a number of roles in the design and delivery of TA to the sites and the foundation. The Team will:

- a. Continue to plan and guide the cross-site TA strategy as the initiative moves forward.
- b. Play a significant role in the planning, design and facilitation of cross-site conferences, workshops and TA sessions. This will begin in earnest in the fall of 1996 -- extending through 1997.
- c. Provide on-site TA to specific sites in one or several of the Focus Areas outlined below.

- d. Assist in the development and monitoring of local TA plans.

This Core TA Team will be augmented by other, more specialized TA which continues to be available to all sites on an as-needed basis. This would include -- but not be limited to:

- Metis (For Information systems and human services & client based information services and systems)
- The Conservation Company (For Research on Resource Development)

Over the next year, it is expected that the Cross-Site Team will be expanded to include skill areas and capacities needed, but not yet represented. Some of these areas include:

- Expertise in Financial Management
- Experience in Human Services related system reform and integrating human services strategies with community building efforts
- Experience/Expertise in Education reform efforts

3. Standards For TA Providers

All RCI sites have access to all Cross-Site TA providers. Clear Expectations and Accountability to both the sites and the foundation will be the standard for the provision of Cross-Site TA and local TA. Specifically, the following expectations will apply to all Cross Site and Local TA providers involved in RCI:

- a. TA providers are expected to "**do their homework**" -- *seek out and make use of available materials and reconnaissance before making site visits*. The burden is on the TA provider to "get up to speed".
- b. TA providers are expected to take the initiative to **communicate regularly** with other **national and local TA providers** working in the site.
- c. TA providers are expected to be knowledgeable and current on the substance of RCI and take responsibility for helping to keep the initiative moving and help create an environment of **honest dialogue** among all parties.
- d. All TA providers working on RCI are expected to use a "**learning organization**" approach to their work.
- e. All TA providers are expected to encourage and help facilitate **peer learning** and cross-site fertilization
- f. TA providers are expected to **communicate regularly** -- and in writing -- **with AECF staff** on the substance and impact of their work.
- g. All TA providers are expected to exercise prudence and good judgement in situations

where **confidentiality** (around issues in the site) is required.

- h. TA providers are expected to encourage and participate in **periodic evaluations** with the RCI sites to assess the productive continuation of the TA relationship.

In addition to these general expectations, TA providers will be required to comply with the following specific procedures:

- a. A current **letter of agreement** between the TA provider and the site should exist and should include the type and scope of expected work and the anticipated number of days committed by the TA provider. Copies of these letters of agreement must be sent to the Foundation and the TA Coordinator.
- b. It is the responsibility of the TA provider to follow all site visits or substantive phone meetings with a short **follow-up memo** to the site to reiterate the substance of the discussions or training and any decisions made or next steps determined.
- c. It is the responsibility of the TA provider to provide the foundation and the TA coordinator with **quarterly up-dates** on their work with the site(s). These can be in the form of a write-up or a collection of the follow-up memoranda which the TA provider has given to the site.

4. **Cross-Site Gatherings**

There will be a number of types of Cross-Site Gatherings during the capacity building phase of RCI.

- a. *Cross Site Team Conferences*

December 3, 4, 5 - 1996
Spring 1997
Fall 1997

Cross-Site Team Conferences during the Capacity Building Phase will be designed to help create "an environment of learning" by engaging the foundation and the sites in honest and intensive dialogue around the focus areas outlined above. The outcome of these meetings -- it is hoped -- will be a) a growing mutual understanding of the process, challenges and measures of success in RCI, as well as b) specific, concrete strategies in each site for engaging the community, building the partnerships and the partner organizations, tackling challenges in systems change strategies, and developing a long term resource base for the initiative.

Beginning in December, Cross Site Team Conferences will be held in RCI cities. These meetings will be largely planned and facilitated by the Cross Site TA Team to allow both the foundation and the sites to fully engage in the discussion.

b. *TA Oversight Meetings/Site Meetings*

February 1997

July 1997

There will be 2 TA Strategy Meetings over the next 16 months. These meetings will involve RCI project directors, AEC staff, and TA providers. These meetings will be used to monitor and guide the TA effort and will replicate the kinds of discussions which took place on July 10--11 1996.

Coupled with these TA meetings will be Site Meetings where the teams from each site will meet individual with the AEC staff and TA providers working directly in their sites. These meetings will replace the Quarterly Site Meetings which were started last year. These coupled meetings will take place in Baltimore and last three days. However, they will be organized as follows so the vast majority of participants will only need to commit a total of two days in Baltimore.

DAY 1 DAY 2	DAY 3
Site Meetings: ie. DSNI MHCDO NEWSSED	ALL DAY TA STRATEGY MEETING	Site Meetings: ie. Warren Conner Germantown

c. *Special Cross-Site Meetings*

The Foundation is committed to providing resources for special targeted cross-site meetings as the initiative progresses. The first of these will be held on October 28-29 and will focus on *Evaluation and Documentation in RCI*. The scheduling and planning for special meetings will be an item on the agenda of both Team Conferences and TA Strategy Meetings

5. *Documentation of Learning*

During the capacity Building Phase, the focus on documentation should increase dramatically. The need to capture and document the lessons and learning that is taking place within RCI is essential for the initiative and the field. The cross-site team will

help facilitate a process whereby the foundation, the sites and the initiative evaluators agree on and begin implementing a program of documentation.

B. Local Technical Assistance

Essential to the success of RCI is the ability of the local site to access to the kinds of TA which it needs to effectively build community. Beyond the ability to access Cross-Site TA, each site has varying requirements for local TA in organizational development, information systems, and collaboration strategies among other areas. The Foundation has made a commitment to encourage and support the ability of the sites to package and pay for the help that they need in these areas. The following are the components of the Local Technical Assistance requirements for RCI:

1. Local Technical Assistance Strategy Plans & Budgets

As part of the annual process of developing an RCI workplan and budget, each site will include a specific TA Strategy Plan & Budget. These plans are required and will be necessary in order to access foundation support for Cross-Site and/or local TA. The first of these plans will be developed over the remainder of 1996 and go into effect the first of 1997.

Each Local TA Plan will include strategies for supporting the development of each of 3 constituency groups:

a. TA & Training for the Lead Organization

What is needed by the grantee/lead organization to continue its capacity building and strategic planning work so that it can best lead the initiative and manage its other essential work?

b. TA & Training for Partner/Collaborating Organizations

Which existing/new partners are essential to the implementation of the community building plan? What kinds of assistance do they need in order to be effective partners and to play a productive role in this effort?

c. TA & Training for Governance Body

As this new community institution develops it faces its own strategic planning issues and organizational development issues. What kind of TA will it -- and its leaders -- require in order to be an effective, accountable community governance body?

Each plan will include strategies for addressing each of the key **Focus Areas** outlined below:

- Organizational Development
- Community Engagement

- Institutional Relations
- System Change Strategies
- Long Range Resource Development
- Site Specific Program Related TA (ie. Neighborhood Based Service Systems, Housing, Education etc.)

Each plan will include a specific budget for TA which itemizes the amounts needed to support TA for each of the constituent groups. The site and the foundation will share the costs of TA which is needed -- beyond that available from the Cross-Site Team and the TA coach. The Foundation will establish a maximum amount of the contribution which it will make to local TA costs -- as well as any matching requirements.

In addition to the budget, the plan will detail the scope of assistance needed, the roles which TA providers will play, and the specific individuals or firms which have already been selected to provide assistance.

2. Local Organizational Development Coach

All RCI sites will continue to have the ability to contract with a Local OD Coach during the capacity building phase. Financial support for this position will be provide by the Foundation. The role of the Local OD Coach is to assist in carrying out the organizational development strategies which are indicated in the RCI workplans and Local TA plans. OD Coaches -- like other RCI TA providers are expected to live up to the expectations outlined earlier in this memo. In addition -- it is expected that OD coaches will work closely with Cross-Site TA providers who are involved in the site. OD coaches will be expected to sign letters of agreement with the site which outline the specific type and scope of work that they will be performing. A copy of this letter will go to both the foundation and the RCI TA Coordinator. In addition to providing on-site TA and training, OD Coaches are encouraged to attend cross-site TA and Training activities. AECF will provide support for their attendance at these events.

III. Focus Areas For TA in the Capacity Building Phase

Technical Assistance in the Capacity Building Phase will be principally focused on a number of **Focus Areas** which we anticipate will require a significant amount of support in the Capacity Building Phase of RCI. These are:

- a. Organizational Development
 - Financial & Administrative Systems Development - The cross site TA will focus on this critical aspect of capacity building for the lead organizations and their partners.
 - On-going OD Needs of the Lead Organization - The capacity of the lead organization to continue its development over the next several years is critical to

the initiative. There may be unanticipated needs or needs that go beyond the purview of the local OD coaches which need to be addressed by Cross-Site TA providers

b. Community Engagement

Fundamental to the success of RCI is the ability of the lead organizations, the governance body, and the various partners to successfully engage members of the community in planning, organizing, problem solving, mobilization, community education and so on. A major focus of the Cross-Site Team will be to:

- Assist sites in developing and implementing strategies,
- Facilitate peer to peer analysis and critique of methods and approaches, and
- Disseminate information on effective and ineffective approaches.

c. Institutional Relations

A major phenomena of the capacity building phase will be *significant shifts in the relationships* among a) the lead organization, b) the governance structure and c) new, emerging or existing institutional partners. The success of RCI hinges on a) how carefully and strategically these shifts take place, and b) how effective a team for community change this collection of institutions ends up being. The following issues will be a major concern of the Cross Site TA team:

- The continued development of the Initiative Governance Structure and the relationship between this body and the lead organization,
- The continued development of Partners and Collaborators and relations among them, the lead organization and the governance structure

d. Systems Change Strategies

One of the major objectives of RCI is to assist in the development of more effective community-based systems of support for families and children. Consistent with the mission of the foundation, RCI is interested in promulgating human service systems that a) are neighborhood based and b) are family centered. In most neighborhoods -- including the five RCI sites -- the development of such systems will require fundamental systems change. As the initiative moves forward, the Cross Site Team will a) try to help define and clarify what is meant by "systems change" at the neighborhood level, and b) connect sites with additional high level TA so that groups can plan and implement ambitious agendas for change in a variety of areas. This TA will be designed to:

- Help sites understand how local and state systems function

- Assist sites in identifying opportunities to lead -- or be part of systems change strategies
- Help sites identify and remove barriers to advancing their own plans for systems change

e. Long Range Resource Development Strategies

RCI resources will only go so far to support systems change efforts in the 5 sites. Cross-Site Team Members will work with the sites and the foundation to begin to identify longer term, substantial public and private resources to support the agendas being developed by the sites.