GAO

United States Government Accountability Office

Report to Congressional Requesters

GRANTS MANAGEMENT

Agencies Provided Many Types of Technical Assistance and Applied Recipients' Feedback

Accessible Version

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Agencies Provided Many Types of Technical Assistance and Applied Recipients' Feedback

Why GAO Did This Study

The overall goal of technical assistance is to enhance the delivery of agency programs and help ensure grantee compliance. GAO was asked to review issues related to technical assistance for grants at Education, ACF, and ETA.

This report (1) describes how Education, ACF, and ETA provide technical assistance to grantees; and (2) examines to what extent these agencies evaluate the technical assistance. For this review, GAO selected 10 grant programs from the three agencies based on fiscal year 2018 funding information and the purpose of the grant.

GAO reviewed documents and interviewed agency officials about the technical assistance provided, the provider and recipient of technical assistance, and the amount obligated in fiscal year 2018 for the 10 grant programs reviewed. GAO also reviewed documents and interviewed agencies about the extent to which they evaluated technical assistance, whether they gathered feedback from the recipients of technical assistance, and whether feedback was included in the evaluations for the 10 grant programs reviewed.

What GAO Found

Technical assistance refers to programs, activities, and services provided by federal agencies to strengthen the capacity of grant recipients and to improve their performance of grant functions. Technical assistance can improve the performance or management of grant program recipients. Technical assistance includes the improvement of grant outcomes, grant management, grantee compliance, project monitoring and evaluation, and interactions with stakeholders.

The technical assistance provided by the selected agencies—the Department of Education (Education), the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families (ACF), and the Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration (ETA)—is designed to align with the requirements of each agency's grant programs and the individual grantee's needs. The types of technical assistance provided by agencies varied and included a range of delivery methods shown below.

Types of Technical Assistance Provided by Selected Agencies
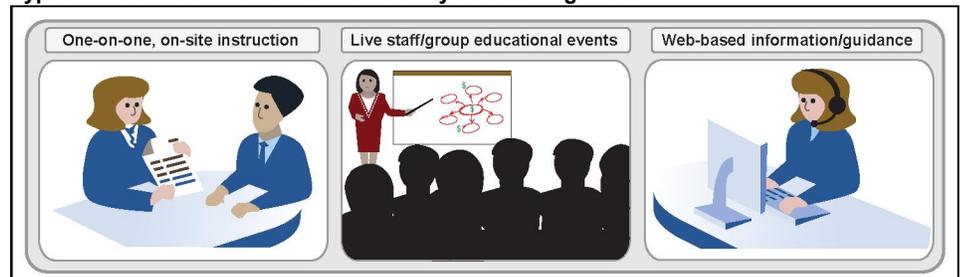
Source: GAO analysis of information from selected agencies. | GAO-20-580

Education tailors its approach to provide technical assistance to grantees based on recipients' needs and their efforts to obtain technical assistance. According to ACF, some grant programs have extensive, dedicated technical assistance that is grant specific, while other grant programs share technical assistance resources provided by multiple technical assistance centers. ACF's technical assistance can be based on program office oversight of the grantees that includes financial and internal control reviews and site visits. For ETA, state and local grantees administer ETA-funded programs throughout the country and technical assistance plays a role in ensuring these programs' successful implementation. According to ETA officials, technical assistance activities are based on grant program objectives.

The 10 grant programs GAO reviewed evaluated technical assistance, collected feedback from recipients of the technical assistance, and incorporated feedback into technical assistance. For example, a School Safety National Activities evaluation of one of its national centers included targets for multiple performance measures and the actual performance for each measure. These measures included the percentage of milestones achieved and the percentage of technical assistance and dissemination products and services deemed to be high quality by an independent review panel.

United States Government Accountability Office

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Abbreviations

ACF	Administration for Children and Families
Adult Education	Adult Education National Leadership Activities
CADRE	Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education
CANTASD	National Child Abuse and Neglect Technical Assistance & Strategic Dissemination Center
CBC	Capacity Building Center for Courts
Center for States	National Capacity Building Center for Public Child Welfare Agencies
CLASS®	Classroom Assessment Scoring System
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
Data Systems	Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems
DWTAT	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Dislocated Worker National Reserve Technical Assistance and Training
DOL	Department of Labor
Education	Department of Education
ETA	Employment and Training Administration
Foster Care	Title IV-E Foster Care, Prevention, and Permanency
HHS	Department of Health and Human Services
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IHEs	institutions of higher education
LEAs	local educational agencies
LINCS	Literacy Information and Communications System
NCDB	National Center on Deaf-Blindness
NCSACW	National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare
NCSSLE	National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments
OHS	Office of Head Start
OMB	Office of Management and Budget.
PBIS	National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

P2P	Peer-to-Peer
REMS	Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center
School Safety	School Safety National Activities
SEAs	state educational agencies
Special Education	Special Education Technical Assistance and Dissemination to Improve Services and Results for Children with Disabilities
SST	State Support Team
Stable Families	Promoting Safe and Stable Families
WIOA	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act
YB USA	YouthBuild USA

GAO U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

441 G St. N.W.
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August 11, 2020

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
Republican Leader
Committee on Education and Labor
House of Representatives

The Honorable Brett Guthrie
House of Representatives

Federal agencies provide technical assistance to help government entities and nonprofits properly manage the funding they receive through grant programs, comply with relevant statutes and regulations, and track and improve program performance. In our past work on technical assistance, we have found that the overall goal of technical assistance is to enhance the delivery of agency programs. Technical assistance can be generally defined as training designed to improve the performance or management of grant program recipients.[1] These technical assistance recipients may include state, local, tribal, or nonprofit staff who administer or manage the grant program. Those delivering the technical assistance may be the agencies' program staff or a grantee providing technical assistance through a grant with the specific purpose of providing technical assistance to other grantees.

The current Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic underscores the importance of agencies providing technical assistance to grantees to ensure the continuity of operations of grant programs and the effective use of grant funding. For example, agencies created COVID-19 web pages that include technical assistance resources and frequently asked questions to address state and local officials' grants management questions related to the crisis.

For this engagement you asked us to review technical assistance practices at three federal agencies. This report reviews the technical assistance practices at the Department of Education (Education), the

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[1]GAO, *HUD Management: Impact Measurement Needed for Technical Assistance*, GAO-03-12 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 25, 2002).

Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families (ACF), and the Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration (ETA). We looked at technical assistance practices associated with a set of grant programs we selected from each of these agencies. The appropriations for the 10 grant programs we reviewed for this engagement totaled more than $11.5 billion in fiscal year 2018.

Specifically, this report (1) describes how Education, ACF, and ETA provide technical assistance to grantees; and (2) examines to what extent Education, ACF, and ETA evaluate the technical assistance.

We selected 10 grant programs based on four criteria that are intended to represent a range of types of grant programs. We selected four grant programs at Education and ACF respectively and two at ETA. The four criteria were: a range of the percentage of the total grant amount spent on technical assistance, the highest total dollar amount spent on technical assistance, whether the technical assistance was provided via grants or contracts to obtain a mix of approaches, and the purpose of the grant program.[2] We used fiscal year 2018 funding information from the three agencies as it was the latest available full year of data when we began the review.

Our findings are not generalizable government-wide or to all grant programs at each of the three agencies. The findings illustrate a range of agencies' approaches to evaluating the technical assistance they provide and to gathering and applying feedback on technical assistance from recipients. We also interviewed Office of Management and Budget officials about technical assistance guidance.

For our first objective, for each of the 10 selected grant programs, we reviewed documents and conducted semi-structured interviews with agency officials about the nature of technical assistance provided, the provider and recipient of technical assistance, and the amount obligated for technical assistance in fiscal year 2018.

For our second objective, for each of the 10 selected grant programs, we reviewed documents and conducted semi-structured interviews with

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[2]We defined the purpose of the grant program as including technical assistance if the grant program's description included technical assistance. For purposes of this engagement, the use of the term "grant program" also includes contracts, cooperative agreements, and funds reserved to assist in the management of the grants.

agency officials about the extent to which they evaluated technical assistance, whether they gathered feedback from the recipients of technical assistance, and whether feedback from grantees was included in the evaluations. We counted a grant program as having evaluated technical assistance, collected feedback from recipients of technical assistance, and used feedback if documentation was provided of an example of one instance of each action. We used criteria that included federal standards for internal control and using performance information in decision-making.[3]

We also analyzed information from five associations regarding technical assistance for five of the selected grant programs.[4] We identified and interviewed four associations by asking agency officials for suggestions for relevant grant associations.[5] In addition, we identified an association that provided information on one of the selected grant programs for which an agency had not identified a relevant association.

We conducted this performance audit from April 2019 to August 2020 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

Generally speaking, technical assistance refers to programs, activities, and services provided by federal agencies, nonprofit organizations, or another third party to strengthen the capacity of recipients and to improve their performance with respect to an inherent or assigned grant function.

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[3]GAO, *Managing for Results: Government-wide Actions Needed to Improve Agencies' Use of Performance Information in Decision Making*, GAO-18-609SP (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 5, 2018), and *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, GAO-14-704G (Washington, D.C.: September 2014).

[4]The associations are the American Public Human Services Association, National Association of State Directors of Adult Education, National Association of State Directors of Special Education, National Head Start Association, and YouthBuild USA.

[5]One of these associations, YouthBuild USA, also provides technical assistance for the selected grant program.

Overall, the reasons for providing technical assistance include the improvement of grant outcomes, grant management, grantee compliance, project monitoring and evaluation, and interactions with stakeholders. The types of technical assistance provided by agencies vary and include a range of delivery methods such as in-person and virtual training and webinars, conferences, and individual assistance. See figure 1.

Figure 1: Types of Technical Assistance Provided by Selected Agencies

| One-on-one, on-site instruction | Live staff/group educational events | Web-based information/guidance |
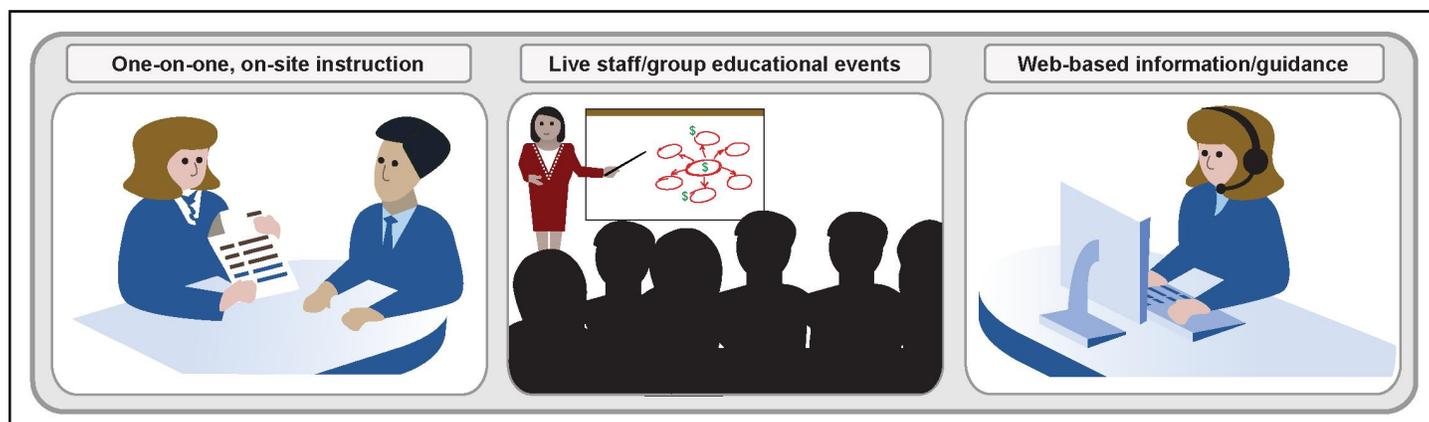
Source: GAO analysis of information from selected agencies. | GAO-20-580

According to agency officials, none of the agencies we spoke to for this review have an established definition for the term "technical assistance." While the term is used in statutory and regulatory language associated with these agencies' selected grant programs, its meaning can vary depending on the program, with individual program offices applying their own working definitions of technical assistance.

The Type of Technical Assistance Provided under the Selected Grant Programs Varies, as Does the Way It Is Delivered and Funded

Technical Assistance Depends on the Requirements of the Grant Programs and the Needs of the Grantees

Each agency seeks to provide technical assistance according to the requirements of its grant programs and the individual needs of the grantees. The types of technical assistance agencies provide and how they deliver and administer it vary. Table 1 lists the 10 grant programs selected for this review, by agency, together with brief program descriptions.

Table 1a: 10 Selected Grant Programs and Descriptions

Department of Education Grant Program	Program Description
School Safety National Activities (School Safety)	Provides activities to improve students' safety and well-being, including providing technical assistance to help schools and state and local educational agencies promote safe and supportive learning environments, and develop, implement, and improve their emergency management plans.
Adult Education National Leadership Activities (Adult Education)	Improves the quality of adult education and literacy programs. Technical assistance includes instruction in meeting the program's statutory requirements and professional development of adult education teachers.
Special Education Technical Assistance and Dissemination to Improve Services and Results for Children with Disabilities (Special Education)	Provides educators, policymakers, and the parents and families of children with disabilities information on effective practices for meeting the needs of children with disabilities and their families.
Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (Data Systems)	Supports states' enhancements to states' educational data systems and the ability of states to efficiently and accurately manage, analyze, and use education data, including individual student records.

Table 1b: 10 Selected Grant Programs and Descriptions

Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families Grant Program	Program Description
Promoting Safe and Stable Families (Stable Families)	Program is intended to prevent the unnecessary separation of children from their families, improve the quality of care and services to children and their families, and ensure permanency for children by reuniting them with their parents, through adoption, or by another permanent living arrangement.
Adoption Opportunities	Provides discretionary funds for projects designed to eliminate barriers to adoption and help find permanent families for children who would benefit from adoption, particularly children with special needs.
Title IV-E Foster Care, Prevention, and Permanency (Foster Care)	Provides safe and stable out-of-home care for children under the jurisdiction of the state or tribal child welfare agency until the children are returned home safely, placed with adoptive families, or placed in other planned arrangements for permanency.
Head Start	Promotes school readiness by enhancing the cognitive, physical, behavioral, and social-emotional development of children through the provision of educational, health, nutritional, social, and other services to low-income children and families.

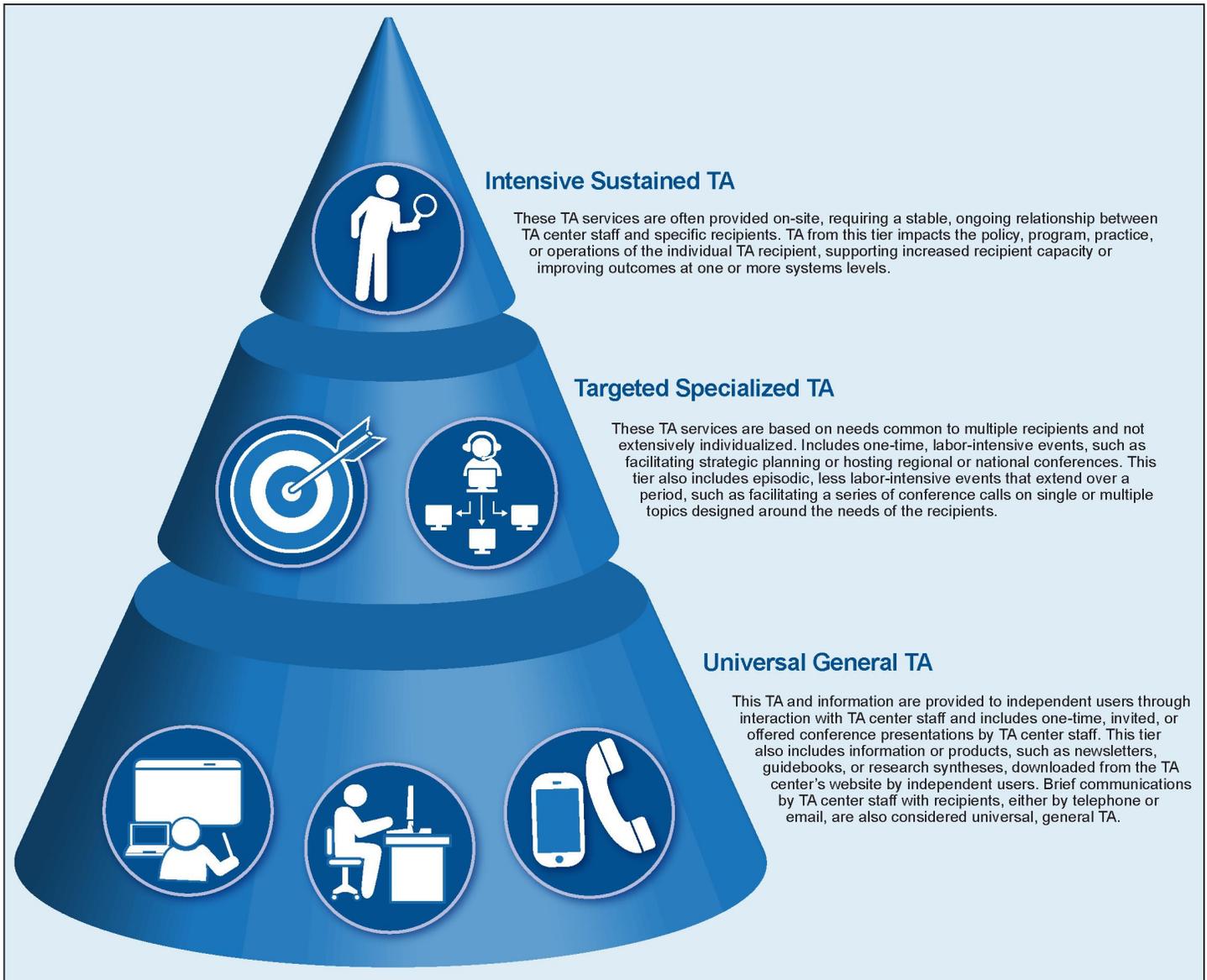**Table 1c: 10 Selected Grant Programs and Descriptions**

Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration Grant Program	Program Description
Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Dislocated Worker National Reserve Technical Assistance and Training (DWTAT)	This is a reserved amount of appropriated funds to assist in the management of the grants authorized under WIOA. WIOA helps job seekers access employment, education, training, and support services. DWTAT funds are intended to enable ETA to provide technical assistance and carry out additional activities related to the transition to WIOA.
YouthBuild	Provides funding for education and training for at-risk youth in the fields of construction and other in-demand industries such as health care. YouthBuild projects build or renovate low-income housing, as well as limited public facilities projects, such as community centers and playgrounds.

Source: GAO analysis of Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Labor information and responses to questions. | GAO-20-580

Education Uses a Multi-tier Approach to Provide Technical Assistance to Grantees through Multiple National Technical Assistance Centers

Education officials told us the agency's multi-tier approach to providing technical assistance to grantees' personnel includes state and local education agencies, institutions of higher education, educators (teachers, school administrators), policymakers (state and local education agencies), other service providers (nonprofits, universities, colleges), and the parents and families of children with disabilities. Explained in terms of a pyramid, most technical assistance provided by Education uses a service model that provides three levels of technical assistance: intensive/sustained at the top, targeted/specialized in the middle, and universal/general across the base. The level of technical assistance provided through this approach depends on the needs of the recipient as determined by the recipient's requests for technical assistance, the recipient's level of experience with a particular grant program, and the recipient's performance under the grant program as determined by agency officials. According to officials, new laws and the need to transition recipients to new statutory requirements can also drive the agency's approach to providing technical assistance. See figure 2.

Figure 2: Department of Education's Multi-tiered Systems of Support Approach to Technical Assistance (TA) Delivery

Intensive Sustained TA

These TA services are often provided on-site, requiring a stable, ongoing relationship between TA center staff and specific recipients. TA from this tier impacts the policy, program, practice, or operations of the individual TA recipient, supporting increased recipient capacity or improving outcomes at one or more systems levels.

Targeted Specialized TA

These TA services are based on needs common to multiple recipients and not extensively individualized. Includes one-time, labor-intensive events, such as facilitating strategic planning or hosting regional or national conferences. This tier also includes episodic, less labor-intensive events that extend over a period, such as facilitating a series of conference calls on single or multiple topics designed around the needs of the recipients.

Universal General TA

This TA and information are provided to independent users through interaction with TA center staff and includes one-time, invited, or offered conference presentations by TA center staff. This tier also includes information or products, such as newsletters, guidebooks, or research syntheses, downloaded from the TA center's website by independent users. Brief communications by TA center staff with recipients, either by telephone or email, are also considered universal, general TA.

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Education information and responses to questions regarding technical assistance. | GAO-20-580

According to Education, at the intensive/sustained top level, a handful of state educational agencies (SEAs), local educational agencies (LEAs), or nonprofits receive on-site, ongoing planned technical assistance, arrived at through negotiations with providers and designed to reach an outcome

desired by the recipient.[1] This level of technical assistance targets a long-term problem.

Through targeted/specialized services in the center of the pyramid, technical assistance centers support activities based on the topical or technical needs common to multiple recipients such as SEAs or LEAs that have expressed common student safety issues. This can be one-time or short-term technical assistance events such as consultation services or regional or national conferences according to Education.

Technical assistance centers also provide universal/general technical assistance services that benefit anyone, not just grantees Education officials told us. This level of technical assistance permits a broader audience access to information and services independently through presentations, newsletters, or research syntheses that are made available on center websites.

The following illustrates the types of technical assistance projects and activities associated with Education grant programs, either through grants with a technical assistance component or through grants with a specific purpose of providing technical assistance.

School Safety National Activities (School Safety): According to Education officials, the School Safety grant program provides activities to improve students' safety and well-being. Education documentation shows that for fiscal year 2018, through this program Education obligated $9,389,762 to support three national technical assistance centers that provided direct technical assistance to SEAs, LEAs, and institutions of higher education (IHEs). Another $23,012,067 supported 37 grants to SEAs to help build state capacity to provide technical assistance to LEAs. In addition, 92 LEAs received grants for local projects that could benefit

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[1]SEA (State Educational Agency) generally means the state board of education or other agency or officer primarily responsible for the supervision of public elementary and secondary schools in a state. In the absence of this officer or agency, it is an officer or agency designated by the governor or state law. LEA (Local Educational Agency) generally means (1) a public board of education or other public authority legally constituted within a state for either administration control of or direction of, or to perform service functions for, public elementary or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or other political subdivision of a state (or such combination of school districts or counties a state recognizes as an administrative agency for its public elementary or secondary schools), or (2) any other public institution or agency that has administrative control and direction of a public elementary or secondary school. 34 C.F.R. § 77.1

from the above technical assistance. The types of activities according to officials that are funded under the program include:

- Providing education-related services such as counseling and referral to mental health services to LEAs and IHEs in which the learning environment has been disrupted by violence or other traumatic crises such as natural disasters;

- Assisting SEAs and LEAs in developing and adopting a multi-tiered decision-making framework that guides the selection, integration, and implementation of evidence-based behavioral practices for improving school climate and behavioral outcomes for all students;

- Increasing states' capacity to assist LEAs by providing training and technical assistance in the development and implementation of high-quality school emergency operations plans; and

- Providing technical assistance to help schools, SEAs, LEAs, and IHEs promote safe and supportive learning environments, and develop, implement, and improve their emergency management plans.

The School Safety grant is served by national centers that provide technical assistance to schools, SEAs, LEAs, and IHEs. For example in fiscal year 2018, agency documentation shows that this grant funded three national centers that provided the program with a variety of distinct technical assistance topics.

- *Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center* (REMS): REMS builds the preparedness capacity (including prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery efforts) of schools, school districts, and IHEs at the local, state, and federal levels. REMS also serves as the primary source of information dissemination for schools, school districts, and IHEs for emergencies via the REMS Technical Assistance Center website.

- *National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments* (NCSSLE): NCSSLE provides technical assistance to SEAs, LEAs, and IHEs to help improve conditions for learning in schools and classrooms and to provide safe and healthy environments that prevent substance abuse, support student academic success, and prevent violence at the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels.

- *National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports* (PBIS): PBIS supports schools, districts, and states to build system capacity for implementing a multi-tiered approach to social, emotional, and behavior support. The overall purpose of PBIS is to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and equity of schools and improve social, emotional, and academic outcomes for students, including students with disabilities and students from underrepresented groups. The University of Oregon is the primary grantee, with other universities participating to provide technical assistance as part of this center's efforts.

REMS and NCSSLE are funded through contracts, while PBIS is funded through a grant.

Adult Education National Leadership Activities (Adult Education): The Adult Education grant program's purpose is to enhance the quality and outcomes of adult education and literacy activities and programs. Education officials told us that the grantees are state and local entities and are the recipients of the technical assistance under this grant with the governor of each state deciding which entity will be the grantee. About half of the grantees are state education departments, while others are state agencies that oversee postsecondary institutions or community colleges, or workforce development agencies.

According to Education, the technical assistance projects associated with the Adult Education program are provided by contractors and each contract for technical assistance is for a period of 3 to 5 years. Some of the contracts under this program are for all 50 states, while others are pilot projects in a few states which will then be implemented in a cohort of states. The types of technical assistance provided under each contract is determined by a performance work statement written by Education, with the terms of each work statement varying depending on the purpose of the technical assistance required under the contract.

Education officials told us that the technical assistance projects help grantees meet the statutory requirements of the Adult Education program, as well as focus on professional development, career pathways, and standards-based instruction, which includes building capacity to train adult education teachers. The following are examples of the types of technical assistance projects funded under the Adult Education grant program.

- *Implementing State-Adopted Challenging Content Standards:* This project is designed to help ensure adult instructional and educational services are based on rigorous state academic content standards. It responds to states' requests for technical assistance in implementing and sustaining standards-based educational reforms and develops and deploys technical assistance services that strengthen states' implementation of and support for content standards grounded in research.

- *Supporting Excellence in Adult Education:* Under this project, the contractor creates a process for identifying high-performing adult education programs based upon data-driven criteria derived from Education's priorities. The contractor vets and selects high-performing programs, publically recognizing the successes of the selected programs, and disseminates information about the successes of these programs to an array of adult education stakeholders nationwide.

- *Literacy Information and Communications System* (LINCS): LINCS is a national electronic database of resources for the adult education/literacy community that represents a substantial portion of Adult Education's technical assistance investment. The LINCS Resource Collection project collects and disseminates adult education resources and provides technical assistance to government entities and the adult literacy field for the improvement of literacy policy and programs. Methods of dissemination include an online resource collection, an online community of practice, and the LINCS Professional Development Center which helps states build their own adult education professional development programs.

According to an adult education grantee association we spoke with, very informal conversations with association members revealed that they view the technical assistance they have received under the Adult Education grant program positively and were pleased with the quality of the technical assistance.

According to the association representative, the contractors who develop and provide technical assistance are very knowledgeable about the Adult Education program. The contractors are experienced in technical assistance development and collect feedback from recipients after technical assistance presentations in the form of surveys and face-to-face discussions. The representative stated that in the last 4 to 5 years the technical assistance providers have fine-tuned the technical assistance they deliver to respond to comments and input from state directors. In

addition, in developing new technical assistance the contractors use experts and researchers to engage in discussions with state and local officials to inform the creation of future technical assistance presentations and materials.

Special Education Technical Assistance and Dissemination to Improve Services and Results for Children with Disabilities (Special Education): The Special Education grant program is administered by the Office of Special Education Programs, a program component of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. According to Education, the Special Education grant is the agency's primary vehicle under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for providing educators, policymakers, other service providers, state and local education agency administrators, and the parents and families of children with disabilities with information on effective practices for meeting the needs of children with disabilities and their families.

The program makes competitive awards to provide technical assistance, support model demonstration projects, disseminate information, and implement activities that are supported by scientifically based research according to agency documentation.[2] These awards are intended to improve services provided under IDEA, including the practices of professionals and others involved in providing services that promote academic achievement and improve results for children with disabilities. Agency documentation shows that the total appropriation amount for this program was $44.3 million for fiscal year 2018.

According to Education officials, a majority of the grants funded under the Special Education program support 14 technical assistance centers that focus on particular topics, populations, or age ranges, such as early intervention services, dispute resolution, early childhood, college- and career-readiness, and positive behavioral interventions and supports to improve results for children with disabilities. While the duration of awards varies with the award's purpose, most individual awards are made for a period of 5 years, therefore not every technical assistance center is funded every year. Officials told us that in fiscal year 2018, the Special Education grant program provided funding to a number of national

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[2]Education may make grants, or enter into contracts or cooperative agreements. 20 U.S.C. § 1463.

technical assistance centers, including the following three selected for this review:

- *Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education* (CADRE): CADRE provides technical assistance to SEAs, LEAs, parent centers, and schools that encourages the use of mediation, facilitation, and other collaborative processes to resolve disagreements between parents and schools about children's educational programs and support services. The Center works to improve dispute resolution options and how dispute resolution is implemented to try to decrease the use of expensive adversarial dispute resolution procedures. Examples of disputes include parents disagreeing with a child's placement or discipline procedures.

- *National Center on Deaf-Blindness* (NCDB): NCDB works to improve the quality of life for children who are deaf-blind and their families.[3] According to NCDB its technical assistance involves a variety of activities, such as information dissemination, training, consultation, and coaching designed to support state deaf-blind projects that provide a range of services designed to improve results for children with deaf-blindness and their families.

- *National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports* (PBIS): Similar to the School Safety grant program, PBIS also supports the Special Education program. PBIS provides the Special Education program with technical assistance for working with children with disabilities whose behavior inhibits being in a school environment or following a school's curriculum.

In addition to national technical assistance centers, the Special Education grant program also funds 47 state-specific deaf-blind centers that provide direct services to schools or families of affected children according to officials. Officials also told us that most of the grants for the state specific deaf-blind centers are between $100,000 and $200,000 annually. We spoke with representatives from a grantee association that is familiar with special education technical assistance. The representatives said that in informal conversations they have had with their members, the members

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[3]Deaf-blindness is a rare condition in which an individual has combined hearing and vision loss, thus limiting access to both auditory and visual information. "Deaf-blindness means concomitant hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness." 34 C.F.R. § 300.8(c)(2).

have been positive regarding the technical assistance provided by the CADRE, NCDB, and PBIS national centers.

Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (Data Systems): The Data Systems grant program is intended to support state enhancements to states' educational data systems and the ability of states to efficiently and accurately manage, analyze, disaggregate, and use education data, including individual student records. According to Education, Data Systems grants are intended to help states, districts, schools, and educators make data-informed decisions to improve student learning and outcomes, as well as facilitate research into increasing student achievement and closing achievement gaps. The Data Systems grant program has awarded competitive, cooperative agreement grants to states since 2005. The grants extend for 3 to 5 years for up to $20 million per grantee. Grantees are required to submit annual reports and a final report on the development and implementation of their respective states' data systems. All 50 states, five territories, and the District of Columbia are eligible to apply.

In addition to the grants, the Data Systems program offers services and resources to assist all SEAs and LEAs with data-related work regardless of whether the state is currently a grantee of the program. Best practices, lessons learned, and nonproprietary products/solutions developed by recipients of Data System grants as well as other states are disseminated to aid state and local education agencies. According to officials, this technical assistance is delivered in a variety of ways including in person at annual best practice conferences, in webinars each month on topics that states request, and at regional meetings on topics in response to state requests.

In addition, according to Education the Data Systems program has developed a State Support Team (SST) of data systems experts whose primary objective is the direct support of states' longitudinal data systems. Areas of SST assistance include, but are not limited to, data governance, stakeholder engagement, project management, sustainability, and data use. The SST also provides support related to early childhood initiatives, K-12 systems, postsecondary systems, workforce data, and other areas critical to statewide longitudinal data system efforts. All states and territories, regardless of whether they have received a Data Systems program grant, can request support from the SST.

Some Administration for Children and Families Grant Programs Have Extensive Technical Assistance Programs while Other Grant Programs May Share Technical Assistance Resources

According to Administration for Children and Family (ACF) officials, some individual discretionary grant programs have extensive technical assistance programs. The type of technical assistance provided to grantees can be based on ACF program office oversight of the grantees, including financial reviews, reviews of internal controls, site visits, or virtual site visits (if resources are limited). Officials told us that the technical assistance resulting from these types of reviews and visits is focused on the grantee's management of the grant (e.g., technical assistance involving financial issues or reporting requirements). In other cases, technical assistance is focused on grant program areas and is intended to help grantees achieve better grant project outcomes.

ACF officials told us that the agency awards training and technical assistance grants to organizations that, in turn, provide grantees with subject matter experts to help grantees develop technical assistance plans that focus on grant project outcomes. While some grant programs have dedicated technical assistance that is specific to the grant, other grant programs may share technical assistance resources. Examples of these two approaches to technical assistance can be seen in ACF's Head Start grant program and some of ACF's Children's Bureau grant programs selected for review.

Head Start: The Head Start program delivers comprehensive educational, social, health, nutritional, and other services to low-income families and their children. These services include preschool education, family support, health screenings, and access to dental care. The Office of Head Start (OHS) administers grant funding and oversight to the approximately 1,600 grantees, which include public and private nonprofit and for-profit organizations that provide Head Start services in local communities. The Head Start services delivered nationwide through these grantees tailor the federal program to the local needs of families in their service area.[4]

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[4]For purposes of this report, we use the term "Head Start" to refer to both Head Start, which provides services for preschool children ages 3 to the age of compulsory school attendance, and Early Head Start, which provides services to infants and toddlers under the age of 3, as well as pregnant women.

OHS officials characterized Head Start as having a robust technical assistance program supported by almost $236 million in obligations in fiscal year 2018, which is the highest obligated amount for technical assistance across ACF. According to these officials, Head Start technical assistance can take the form of webinars, in-person training, and content on the Head Start website. According to Head Start officials, the program has funding specifically set aside for four dedicated national centers that develop technical assistance focusing on child development and learning; health, safety, and behavioral health; family and community engagement; and program management.

- *Early Childhood Health and Wellness:* This center is intended to advance best practices for linking health and early childhood education systems according to agency officials. The center's work includes providing support on topics such as health promotion and disease prevention; emergency preparedness and environmental safety; trauma and toxic stress; developmental, behavioral, vision, and hearing screening; and nutrition.

- *Parent, Family, and Community Engagement:* Head Start officials stated that this center supports family well-being, effective family and community engagement, and children's school readiness, including transitions to kindergarten. The center's work includes providing training and technical assistance on staff-family relationship building practices that are culturally and linguistically responsive; integrated and systemic family engagement strategies; consumer education; family leadership; family economic stability; and individualized support for families facing adversity.

- *Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning:* This center, according to officials, assists in the implementation of child development, teaching, and learning practices that are culturally and linguistically responsive across early childhood programs. The center's work supports strong professional development systems including professional development for the infant/toddler and preschool workforce; early learning standards; screening and assessment; culturally and linguistically age appropriate practices; enhancing teacher/child interactions; supporting networks of infant/toddler practitioners; supporting children with disabilities; and using data to improve practices.

- *National Center on Program Management and Fiscal Operations:* This center disseminates information on OHS priorities for the development and implementation of management systems and

internal controls. The center's work includes topics such as risk management; governance, data collection, and analysis; budgeting; and management of multiple funding sources according to program officials.

In addition to the four national centers, Head Start officials told us that the program has 12 technical assistance contracts that are organized around 10 geographic regions, one tribal contract, and one contract for migrant-related services.[5] Each contract contains the same categories of specialists and same scope of work for the training and technical assistance provided by the specialists. The number of specialists in each category is tied to the number of programs or grantees in a particular regional office. Information on the primary areas of work for each specialist can be found in appendix I.

Selected Children's Bureau Grant Programs: According to the Children's Bureau, it is the oldest federal agency for children and administers federal child welfare programs. The Children's Bureau describes its functions as including directing the implementation of comprehensive monitoring protocols and data collection systems designed to assess and ensure states meet the standards and outcomes established for the federal child protection, adoption, and foster care and guardianship programs. The Children's Bureau also directs national technical assistance efforts to support best practices in child welfare programming. Three of the four ACF grant programs we selected for review are managed out of the Children's Bureau program office. The following are summaries of each of the three selected programs.

- *Promoting Safe and Stable Families:* The primary goals of the Promoting Safe and Stable Families program are preventing the unnecessary separation of children from their families, improving the quality of care and services to children and their families, and ensuring permanency for children by reuniting them with their parents, through adoption, or by another permanent living arrangement. According to Children's Bureau, the services are designed to help state child welfare agencies and eligible tribes establish and operate integrated, preventive family preservation services and community-based family support services for families at risk or in crisis. Some grant funds go directly to child welfare

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[5]These offices are located in Boston; New York City; Philadelphia; Atlanta; Chicago; Kansas City, MO; Dallas; Denver; San Francisco; and Seattle. The Regional Offices for American Indian and Alaska Native and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs are located in Washington, D.C.

agencies to be used in accordance with their 5-year plans, while other grant funds are set aside for nationally funded evaluation, research, and training and technical assistance projects. In addition, funds are also set aside for state court improvement programs.

- *Adoption Opportunities:* This program provides discretionary funds for projects designed to eliminate barriers to adoption and help find permanent families for children who would benefit from adoption, particularly older children, minority children, and children with special needs. According to Children's Bureau, program areas include, but are not limited to, the development and implementation of:

  - a national adoption and foster care data gathering and analysis system;

  - a national adoption information exchange system; and

  - an adoption training and technical assistance program.

- *Title IV-E Foster Care, Prevention, and Permanency:* The Foster Care program helps states and Indian tribes provide safe and stable out-of-home care for children under the jurisdiction of the state or tribal child welfare agency until the children are returned home safely, placed with adoptive families, or placed in other planned arrangements for permanency.[6] The Foster Care program provides funds to assist with the costs of foster care maintenance for eligible children; administrative costs to manage the program; and training for public agency staff and foster parents.

Children's Bureau grant programs often share resources from multiple technical assistance projects. The three grant programs selected for this review draw technical assistance from a number of different technical assistance projects. As shown in table 2 below, many of these technical assistance projects provide resources to multiple grant programs. Information on the individual technical assistance projects is contained in appendix I.

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[6]For purposes of this report, the term Indian tribes also includes tribal organizations and tribal consortia.

GAO-20-580 Grants Technical Assistance

Table 2: Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Children's Bureau Grant Programs That Share Technical Assistance Project Resources, Fiscal Year 2018

na	na	Grant Programs		
Technical Assistance Project	**Funding Type**	**Promoting Safe and Stable Families**	**Adoption Opportunities**	**Title IV-E Foster Care, Prevention, and Permanency**
National Capacity Building Center for Public Child Welfare Agencies ("Center for States")	Contract	X	X	
National Child Welfare Capacity Building Center for Tribes	Grant		X	X
Capacity Building Center for Courts (CBC)	Grant	X	X	
Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse	Contract			X
National Child Abuse and Neglect Technical Assistance & Strategic Dissemination Center (CANTASD)	Contract	X	X	
Child Welfare Information Gateway	Contract	X	X	
National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare (NCSACW)	Interagency Agreement	X		
AdoptUSKids	Grant		X	

Source: GAO analysis of ACF information and responses to questions regarding technical assistance. | GAO-20-580

For example, the Stable Families and Adoption Opportunities programs both use services from four of the same technical assistance projects, the Center for States, CBC, CANTASD, and the Child Welfare Information Gateway. Three of the projects in table 2, the Center for States, CBC, and the National Child Welfare Capacity Building Center for Tribes are part of the Children's Bureau's Child Welfare Capacity Building Collaborative (the Collaborative). The Collaborative is a partnership among the three centers that consolidates child welfare services that had previously been organized by topic area and geographic region. This design is an effort to build capacity among public child welfare agencies, tribes, and courts by increasing coordination, leveraging resources, and providing services—including technical assistance—in a more strategic manner according to Children's Bureau officials.

Employment and Training Administration Technical Assistance Activities Include both Proactive and Reactive Actions in Grant Administration and Management

According to officials, the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) relies on state, local, and nonprofit grantees to administer ETA-funded programs throughout the country. Technical assistance plays a role in ensuring that these programs are successfully implemented. According to

ETA officials, while it is not specifically defined by the Department of Labor (DOL) or ETA in regulation or guidance, technical assistance refers to a range of activities which reflects the objectives the individual grant program is trying to achieve. Officials told us that technical assistance activities include both proactive and reactive actions in grant administration and management.

For example, depending on the individual grant program and the needs of specific grantees, technical assistance could be provided to help a well-performing grantee deliver higher-quality services or to assist an "at-risk" grantee who is struggling to stay in compliance with rules and requirements. According to officials, technical assistance can be delivered remotely using webinars, podcasts, tool kits, and desk guides, or in person through training by agency or contractor staff for individual grantees and through peer-to-peer conversations between grantees.

Officials said that while they do not think of technical assistance as falling into particular categories, such as grants management assistance or specific performance outcomes, they do have a logic model that illustrates how outcomes should flow from the kind of technical assistance provided by ETA or its contractors.[7] The logic model links the origination, creation, dissemination, and short- and long-term outcomes of technical assistance. In addition to a single overarching logic model, five smaller logic models tailored to specific technical assistance target areas identified by ETA were also developed. These logic models explain technical assistance in greater detail by isolating target areas, specifically (1) individual customer services, (2) employer customer services, (3) systems and policy alignment, (4) cost efficiency, and (5) performance measurement.

According to ETA, it has begun implementing the logic models using a progressive approach to evaluating the agency's technical assistance, thereby moving the agency from assessing technical assistance use (outputs), to measuring the effectiveness of technical assistance in changing grantee behavior (outcomes). ETA has also begun using technical assistance contractors to conduct self-assessment and continuous improvement efforts with respect to technical assistance

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[7]ETA uses a technical assistance logic model that was included in a December 2014 report called the *Technical Assistance Evaluation Feasibility Study* (study). The study was prepared for DOL by IMPAQ International, LLC.

effectiveness and has directed some contractors to use the logic models as part of this process.

Below are specific examples of the technical assistance provided by ETA for two of its grant programs: the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Dislocated Worker National Reserve Technical Assistance and Training (DWTAT) and DOL YouthBuild Program (YouthBuild).

DWTAT: WIOA is the current authorizing legislation for most of ETA's programs designed to help job seekers access employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market and to match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy. WIOA Title I authorizes annual formula grants to state workforce agencies to serve Adults, Dislocated Workers, and Youth. The WIOA Title I Dislocated Worker Program assists workers who have been laid off or have been notified that they will be terminated or laid off. The Dislocated Worker National Reserve is not one specific grant program, but rather is an appropriation of authorized funds set aside for specified purposes to help dislocated workers. These purposes include National Dislocated Worker Grants, which are discretionary grants awarded under WIOA to provide resources to states and other eligible applicants to respond to large, unexpected layoffs causing significant job losses. National Dislocated Worker Grants are intended to temporarily expand capacity to serve dislocated workers and meet the increased demand for WIOA employment and training services, with a purpose to re-employ laid off workers and enhance their employability and earnings.

Another specified purpose for the Dislocated Worker National Reserve is technical assistance and training. According to the agency, DWTAT funds are designed to support the coordination, development, and provision of training, technical assistance, and staff development to states, localities, and other entities involved in assisting dislocated workers under WIOA. Although under statute the DWTAT is a reserved amount of appropriated funds for assisting states that do not meet performance accountability measures and promoting the continuous improvement of assistance provided to dislocated workers, recent appropriations language has expanded the reserve amount and permitted use of the DWTAT funds to include WIOA implementation activities.

ETA officials told us that the technical assistance funded by the DWTAT is delivered by federal staff and contractors and includes, among other things, performance accountability training, in-person and online training, on-demand coaching, webinars, and online desk references. This

technical assistance is intended to promote the continuous improvement of assistance provided to job seekers and employers under WIOA.

According to ETA officials, the provision of technical assistance to grantees under the DWTAT is based on an assessment conducted by DOL regional offices of the grantee's readiness to perform under the grant program. According to officials, the content and type of technical assistance provided is written into the contracts with the technical assistance providers.

An example of the type of technical assistance that ETA funded in fiscal year 2018 under the DWTAT was the Real-Time Technical Assistance and Regional and State-Specific Technical Assistance and Training contract.[8] The types of technical assistance provided by the contractor included:

- Planning and executing in-person meetings;

- Identifying and customizing existing technical assistance tools and resources;

- Developing, delivering, and disseminating new technical assistance;

- Writing technical assistance/training materials;

- Conducting on-site technical assistance—including training and workshops;

- Hosting peer-to-peer learning exchanges; and

- Facilitating events and meetings.

This technical assistance was provided directly to 19 states and territories with additional states participating in region-wide projects through a variety of means, such as in-person conferences. According to agency written responses, this contract was designed to address WIOA grantees' "real-time" technical assistance needs. Feedback on this technical assistance was provided primarily through iterative conversations between the technical assistance provider and recipients. The provider is able to customize technical assistance to each recipient's specific needs as they arise. For example, according to ETA officials, a state's workforce development board requested strategic board training, which the regional

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[8]The technical assistance activities described took place during the course of option year 1 of this contract, June 5, 2018, to June 4, 2019.

office determined could be delivered under this contract. The technical assistance provider then discussed the state board's technical assistance needs via phone and email, developed a customized agenda and slide presentation, and delivered the training to members of the workforce development board, according to ETA officials.

YouthBuild: According to ETA officials, YouthBuild grants provide funding for education as well as training for at-risk youth between the ages of 16 and 24 in the fields of construction and other in-demand industries such as health care. The education provided by YouthBuild supports the attainment of high school diplomas or equivalency degrees for participants, while training in construction, through the building or renovating of low-income housing, as well as training in additional in-demand industries through a career pathways approach. Additional information on the YouthBuild program is contained in appendix II.

ETA officials told us that the program's contractor, YouthBuild USA (YB USA), delivers technical assistance to the program's grantees, which include local and national nonprofits, community colleges, and state and local agencies. Each YouthBuild grant, according to officials, has a 3-year and 4-month period of performance. Officials also stated that the technical assistance YB USA provides focuses on ensuring that grantees follow the YouthBuild program model. The technical assistance provided includes a program coach for each grant; in-person and virtual events, such as annual new grantee orientation, peer-to-peer trainings, and monthly webinars; and deliverables, such as toolkits, fact sheets on various YouthBuild issues, policy papers, and instruction in topics such as worksite safety, performance reporting, and program best practices, according to officials from ETA.

To support the technical assistance, YB USA submits an annual technical assistance plan that includes, but is not limited to, a description of review and assessment strategies for grantees; descriptions of the frequency and methods of communicating and meeting with grantees; plans for site visits and a tentative meeting schedule; frequency and methods for performance coaching; and plans to develop a peer-to-peer learning network to facilitate communication among grantees.

Examples of YB USA's technical assistance to YouthBuild grantees are documented in its 2018 Technical Assistance Annual Report and include the following:

- YB USA's 2018 Trends First Quarter presentation to DOL focused on construction vocational training, placement data for youth who received construction credentials, as well as housing data.

- YB USA offered a number of instructor certification trainings in 2018, including two National Center for Construction Education and Research instructor certification trainings, one Home Builders Institute instructor certification, and one Occupational Safety and Health Administration construction instructor certification.

- YB USA provided a peer-to-peer (P2P) training event involving grantees from the locations covered by four ETA Regional Offices. Referred to as the Combined P2P, it involved 198 attendees from 98 grantee sites. According to YB USA, combining multiple regions was proposed to help with cost savings, provide a robust learning environment, and give grantees from different parts of the country an opportunity to share diverse best practices and resources.

YB USA officials told us that YouthBuild grantee responses to YB USA's technical assistance offerings have been positive. As an example, YB USA's Annual Report noted that among those attending the Combined P2P training, 100 percent of those who responded to the event's evaluation indicated that the training was excellent or good. Grantees' evaluation comments included their ability to connect and share knowledge and insight with their peers on a larger scale and the multitude of implementation ideas they received given the participation of four regions.

All Selected Grant Programs Evaluated Technical Assistance, Collected Feedback, and Incorporated It into Technical Assistance

Grant Programs' Evaluations of Technical Assistance Varied in Scope

The grant programs' evaluations of technical assistance for the 10 selected grant programs included evaluating the technical assistance providers delivered and whether a specific action was accomplished. They also included both expected and actual performance. For example, a School Safety evaluation of one of its national centers included targets for multiple performance measures and the actual performance for each. These measures included the percentage of milestones achieved and the percentage of technical assistance and dissemination products and services deemed to be high quality by an independent review panel. In addition, a provider of technical assistance for Adult Education was evaluated in four areas, including management and quality.

Adoption Opportunities funded an examination of whether a specific action was accomplished. Its goal was to plan, develop, and implement a program to promote professional leadership of minorities in the adoption field. Fifteen participants completed its new program to promote professional leadership of minorities in the adoption field. The participants completed four courses and a research project. In addition, the next cohort was recruited and the selection process was under way.

All of the 10 selected grant programs provided documentation that compared actual to expected performance. According to federal internal control standards, agencies should compare actual performance to expected performance and evaluate and document monitoring results.[9]

All Selected Grant Programs Collected Feedback and Incorporated It into Technical Assistance

Grant programs collected feedback for a variety of types of technical assistance, including in-person training and online assistance. For example, Data Systems asked participants in an in-person workshop on data system modernization whether they were likely to use what they learned at the workshop and if the workshop was well run. Foster Care

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[9]GAO-14-704G.

also funded asking webinar participants if the information was relevant and helpful, and if they planned to access more information about the webinar topic.[10]

In addition, four of the 10 selected grant programs—Data Systems, Special Education, Stable Families, and YouthBuild—requested feedback on what recipients would find helpful in subsequent technical assistance. For example, Stable Families funded asking recipients how future in-person trainings could be improved, while the remaining three selected grant programs asked what recipients would like future technical assistance to cover. Special Education asked 63 parent centers across the country about their preferred format for accessing resources. Special Education also asked recipients about their preferences for specific training and workshop topics, including conflict coaching and listening skills.

Four of the five associations stated that they received feedback about technical assistance. The one association that provides technical assistance surveyed recipients on its technical assistance. The survey included how satisfied the recipients were with different types of technical assistance, including performance coaching and construction training. The survey also asked about preferred topics for future technical assistance, such as occupational skills training support or case management. The remaining three associations told us they heard feedback about technical assistance through informal conversations.

All of the selected grant programs used feedback from recipients to make changes to technical assistance. The changes made included revising technical assistance and providing new technical assistance. For example:

- **YouthBuild.** The close-out session on the last day of a YouthBuild training received low ratings. Grantees had also mentioned the importance of sharing information with their peers. In response, at the next training, the participants were asked to post questions on wall posters throughout the training. At its close-out session, the trainers connected peer programs that had

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[10]According to federal internal control standards, management should complete and document corrective actions to remediate control deficiencies in a timely manner. We have also previously reported that the benefit of collecting performance information is fully realized only when that information is used to make decisions aimed at improving results.

solutions for the posted questions with those programs that had answers.

- **Adoption Opportunities.** The grant program adjusted the duration of its program to promote professional leadership of minorities in the adoption field in response to participant feedback. Participants provided feedback stating that the workload was unrealistic and that system change took longer than the participants had anticipated. In response, Adoption Opportunities extended the program from 8 to 12 months.

- **Data Systems.** Participant feedback informed the development of new technical assistance. Data Systems hosted a participant focus group. Participants had worked with students who had experienced crises and/or had dealt with a crisis, such as fires or an active shooter. The focus group participants shared information that would support sound data management practices in dealing with a variety of crises. The participants also identified next steps to prepare for and support students and schools in times of crisis.

In addition, two of the associations that we interviewed shared information about recipient feedback. The one association we interviewed that provides technical assistance used feedback from recipients to revise workshops. At a grantee orientation, the recommended audience for workshops was not differentiated by level of experience for grantees. Experienced grantees provided feedback that they did not learn new information at the workshops. At a subsequent meeting, the workshops were differentiated by level of experience. Another association stated that there was no evidence that feedback to technical assistance providers resulted in improvements to technical assistance.

Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this product to the Departments of Education (Education), Health and Human Services (HHS), Labor (DOL), and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for comment. Education, HHS, and DOL provided technical comments, which we incorporated into the report where appropriate.

As agreed with your offices, unless you publicly announce the contents of this report earlier, we plan no further distribution until 30 days from the

report date. At that time, we will send copies to appropriate congressional committees, the Secretaries of Education, HHS, and DOL, and the Director of OMB. In addition, the report will be available at no charge on the GAO website at https://gao.gov.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-6806 or sagerm@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix V.

Michelle Sager
Director, Strategic Issues

Appendix I: Department of Health and Human
Services, Administration for Children and
Families Technical Assistance Information

Appendix I: Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families Technical Assistance Information

Head Start: Technical assistance specialists

In addition to the four national centers, Head Start officials told us that the program has 12 technical assistance contracts that are organized around 10 geographic regions, one tribal contract, and one contract for migrant-related services.[1] Each contract contains the same categories of specialists and same scope of work for the training and technical assistance provided by the specialists. The number of specialists in each category is tied to the number of programs or grantees in a particular regional office. A summary description of the primary areas of work for each category of specialist follows:

- *Early Childhood Specialist:* Selection and implementation of culturally-, linguistically-, age-, and developmentally-appropriate curriculum; ongoing child assessment; and teaching practices needed to support quality services as well as training and technical assistance related to the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS®), coaching, and parent involvement.[2]

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[1]These offices are located in Boston; New York City; Philadelphia; Atlanta; Chicago; Kansas City, MO; Dallas; Denver; San Francisco; and Seattle. The Regional Offices for American Indian and Alaska Native and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs are located in Washington, D.C.

[2]CLASS® is an observation instrument that assesses the quality of teacher-child interactions in center-based preschool classrooms.

Appendix I: Department of Health and Human
Services, Administration for Children and
Families Technical Assistance Information

- *Grantee Specialist:* Management and fiscal operations including the provision of assistance to grantees with findings identified through the federal monitoring system.[3]

- *Health Specialist:* Dissemination and delivery of training and technical assistance related to evidence-based materials and resources from the National Center on Health and Wellness to Regional Office staff, other training and technical assistance specialists, and local grantees.

- *Systems Specialist:* Facilitates collaboration with other organizations in the region that work with young children and families.

The coordination and oversight of the work of these specialists, according to agency officials, is the responsibility of two other categories of specialists—training and technical assistance coordinators and managers—both of whom work closely with the regional federal Contracting Officer's Representative (COR). CORs, in partnership with the regional program manager and others in their regional offices, are responsible for the strategic planning and oversight of training and technical assistance in their regions. The COR meets regularly with the coordinators and managers to determine where to deploy specialists within the region and the type of work they will do.

According to Head Start officials, most training and technical assistance specialists provide on-site training and technical assistance to grantees and are also available to provide training to clusters of grantees with similar interests or concerns or at state and regional events. The work of Early Childhood Specialists, both those who are infant/toddler specialists and those who are preschool specialists, falls into four categories: school readiness; parent and family engagement; professional development for grantee staff; and collaboration at the state level. Grantee Specialists are deployed by the regional offices to work with specific grantees that have

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[3]The Office of Head Start (OHS) uses the Head Start Monitoring System to measure the performance and accountability of Head Start programs across the country. OHS assesses grantee compliance with the Head Start Program Performance Standards, the Head Start Act, and other regulations. The Head Start Monitoring System gives OHS a multiyear perspective on grantee operations with a focus on performance, progress, and compliance. It also provides grantees with opportunities for continuous improvement.

findings identified through federal monitoring reviews.[4] Grantee Specialists may also be assigned to work with grantees with concerns arising from Program Information Reports (PIR), audit findings, or other data reviewed by the Office of Head Start (OHS).[5] These specialists may also conduct training sessions or provide technical assistance for individual grantees or groups of grantees who do not have an identified concern but wish to improve the quality of their programs' systems. Each regional office has at least one Health Specialist who serves as a link between the region and the National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness. The Health Specialist helps to disseminate materials and resources from the center to regional office staff, the specialists, and local grantees. The Health Specialist also provides training and technical assistance to individual grantees or groups of grantees. The Systems Specialist's primary responsibility is to participate on a regional team to identify cross-system coordination opportunities between OHS and the Office of Child Care within the Administration of Children and Families.

Children's Bureau: Technical Assistance Projects

Children's Bureau grant programs often share resources from multiple technical assistance projects. Table 3 below lists the technical assistance projects relevant to the selected Children's Bureau grant programs.

[4]The Head Start Monitoring System conducts off- and on-site reviews, and disseminates its findings through formal monitoring reports. The Monitoring Review Reports summarize the results of different types of monitoring reviews and provide grantees with information regarding their performance and compliance with requirements governing Head Start and Early Head Start programs. This includes those regulations specified in the Head Start Act and all applicable Head Start Program Performance Standards.

[5]OHS PIRs provide comprehensive data on the services, staff, children, and families served by Head Start and Early Head Start programs nationwide. All grantees and delegates are required to submit PIRs for Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

Table 3: Children's Bureau Technical Assistance Projects, Fiscal Year 2018

Project Title	Project Description
National Capacity Building Center for Public Child Welfare Agencies ("Center for States")	This center is part of the Children's Bureau's Child Welfare Capacity Building Collaborative and is the Bureau's principal vehicle for delivering capacity building services to help state and territorial public child welfare agencies. States and territories rely on the center for subject matter expertise in child maltreatment, the full continuum of child welfare practices, and a range of topics related to safety, permanency, and child and family well-being.
National Child Welfare Capacity Building Center for Tribes	This center is part of the Children's Bureau's Child Welfare Capacity Building Collaborative. The center collaborates with American Indian and Alaska Native Nations with the primary goal of supporting tribal child welfare systems, identifying their needs and goals, and providing them with effective capacity building assistance to improve outcomes for their children, youth, and families. The center is the Children's Bureau's principal vehicle for delivering technical assistance to tribal child welfare agencies to meet current and future statutory and regulatory requirements, improve organizational and system performance, and improve outcomes for tribal children, youth, and families.
Capacity Building Center for Courts (CBC)	This center is part of the Children's Bureau's Child Welfare Capacity Building Collaborative and serves as a focal point for national child welfare expertise, training, and technical assistance services for, among others, the Court Improvement Programs (CIP), the Tribal Court Improvement Programs (TCIP), and courts and child welfare attorneys. The center provides expert consultation and delivers an array of training, technical assistance services, and workforce development support designed to build the capacities of state and tribal courts, CIPs, TCIPs, and child welfare attorneys to meet federal requirements, and to participate in federal monitoring and related state and tribal child welfare program improvement planning activities.
Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse	The clearinghouse was established to conduct an independent systematic review of research on programs and services intended to provide enhanced support to children and families and prevent foster care placements. The clearinghouse was developed in accordance with the Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018.[6] The project reviews evidence on mental health, substance abuse prevention and treatment, in-home skill-based programs and services, as well as kinship navigator programs. The clearinghouse website allows users to find program or service ratings, learn about the review process, sign up for email updates, and find answers to frequently asked questions.
National Child Abuse and Neglect Technical Assistance and Strategic Dissemination Center (CANTASD)	The focus of this center is to provide logistics and strategic communication services to support conferences and meetings on issues related to the continuum of child welfare agency services. This includes issues related to abuse prevention, child protective services, family preservation services, and foster care. The center also focuses on providing activities related to supporting the child welfare system, creating resources and peer learning activities. These efforts include hosting 30-to-45-minute webinars and developing social media and public awareness messages regarding child abuse and neglect prevention.
Child Welfare Information Gateway	This project is an online clearinghouse that promotes the safety, permanency, and well-being of children, youth, and families by connecting child welfare, adoption, and related professionals as well as the public to information, resources, and tools covering topics on child welfare, child abuse and neglect, out-of-home care, and adoption. The gateway serves as a national hub collecting, synthesizing, and sharing child welfare knowledge via print and electronic publications, websites, databases, and online learning tools for improving child welfare practices.

[6]Pub. L. No. 115-123, div. E, title VII, 132 Stat. 64, 232 (2018).

Project Title	Project Description
National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare (NCSACW)	This national resource center provides information, expert consultation, training and technical assistance to child welfare, dependency court, and substance abuse treatment professionals. The goal of the center is to improve family recovery, safety, and stability by advancing practices and collaboration among agencies, organizations, and courts working with families affected by substance use and co-occurring mental health disorders and child abuse or neglect.
AdoptUsKids	This project is designed to raise public awareness about the need for foster and adoptive families for children in the public child welfare system. It is designed to assist states, territories, and tribes to recruit, engage, develop, and support foster and adoptive families. The project has multiple components including: the national adoption recruitment campaign, the national photolisting, the adoption and foster care information exchange system, and a national minority professional leadership development project.

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, and Children's Bureau information and responses to questions. | GAO-20-580

Appendix II: Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration

YouthBuild: Grant Program Information

According to YouthBuild USA, the contractor for the YouthBuild program, YouthBuild students spend roughly half their time in the classroom working toward their high school diploma or its equivalent. The other half of students' time is spent acquiring the skills and industry-recognized certifications they need to succeed in careers through participating in hands-on work experience and certification processes. The YouthBuild program's transition coordinators and job developers help students to assess their skills and interests and match them to local labor market trends to help the students make informed career and educational choices. Further, the YouthBuild program can also work with students to access postsecondary institutions.

Appendix III: Examples of Grant Programs' Statutory Language Directing Agencies' Approaches to Technical Assistance and Its Funding

The provision of technical assistance and the level of funding for such assistance can be specified by the statute authorizing a particular grant program or programs. In some cases the statutory authority for the grant program will specify the type of technical assistance that is required to be provided as well as the type of technical assistance that may be provided. Some statutes leave the amount of funding for technical assistance up to agency management, while other statutes dictate that a particular percentage of the grant program's funding is to be used for technical assistance.

Below are examples of the direction provided by the statutes that govern technical assistance for the selected Departments of Education (Education), Health and Human Services (HHS), and Labor (DOL) grant programs.

Education: The statutory language of the selected Education grant programs specify the nature of the technical assistance that can be provided under the various programs. For example, the School Safety program's statute states that a portion of the program's funds may be used to carry out activities to improve students' safety and well-being, such as providing technical assistance to states and local educational agencies.[1]

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[1] 20 U.S.C. § 7281(a)(1)(B).

The Adult Education program's statute establishes both required technical assistance activities as well as those activities that are allowable.[2] Activities required by the statute include carrying out rigorous research and evaluation on effective adult education and literacy activities, as well as estimating the number of adults functioning at the lowest levels of literacy proficiency.[3] Those activities that are allowable include assistance related to professional development activities, and assistance for the purposes of developing, improving, identifying, and disseminating the most successful methods and techniques for providing adult education and literacy activities, based on scientifically valid research.[4] Appendix IV lists the 2018 fiscal year obligation amounts for the technical assistance projects and providers for each of the selected Education grant programs.

HHS, Administration for Children and Families (ACF): The Head Start authorizing statute requires that HHS provide, either directly or through grants, contracts, or other arrangements, technical assistance, and training for Head Start programs to improve program quality and help prepare children to succeed in school.[5] The statute requires HHS to reserve each fiscal year between 2.5 and 3 percent of sums appropriated for Head Start to fund training and technical assistance activities.[6] Of this reserved amount, not less than 20 percent shall be set aside to be used to fund training and technical assistance activities for Early Head Start programs. Of this portion set aside, not less than 50 percent is to be made available to Early Head Start agencies to use directly to carry out training and technical assistance activities.[7] Of the rest of the reserved amount, not less than 50 percent is to be made available to Head Start agencies to use directly to make program improvements by carrying out

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[2]Of the funding authorized for adult education and literacy programs under section 3275 of title 29, United State Code, 2 percent is reserved to carry out the Adult Education program (capped at $15 million). 29 U.S.C. § 3291(a)(1).

[3]29 U.S.C. § 3332(b)(3).

[4]29 U.S.C. § 3332(c)(1)(A).

[5]42 U.S.C. § 9843(a)(1).

[6]42 U.S.C. § 9835(a)(2)(C)(i). HHS is currently permitted to reduce this reservation of funds. Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020, Pub. L. No. 116-94, div. A, tit. II, (H.R. 1865-39) (2019).

[7]42 U.S.C. § 9840a(g)(2)(A)(i).

training and technical assistance activities.[8] Further, not less than 25 percent shall be available to HHS to support a state-based training and technical assistance system or a national system, for supporting program quality. Finally, the remainder of this this reserved amount is available for HHS to assist Head Start agencies in meeting and exceeding Head Start performance standards by carrying out specified technical assistance and training activities.[9]

Provisions for the three selected Children's Bureau programs include various requirements for technical assistance. For example, under the Stable Families grant program, for each fiscal year HHS shall use not less than $1 million for evaluations, research, and providing technical assistance with respect to supporting monthly caseworker visits with children who are in foster care under the responsibility of the state.[10] Under the Adoption Opportunities program, HHS technical assistance requirements include providing for the provision of technical assistance in the planning, improving, developing, and carrying out of programs and activities relating to adoption, and promoting professional leadership training of minorities in the adoption field.[11]

HHS is also required to provide technical assistance and resource and referral information to assist state or local governments with, among other things, termination of parental rights issues, in recruiting and retaining adoptive families, and in the successful placement of older children, minority children, and children with special needs.[12] Among the statutory requirements of the Foster Care program is that HHS shall provide technical assistance to states and, as applicable, Indian tribes regarding the provision of services and programs related to prevention.[13] HHS shall

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[8]Specifically, those training and technical assistance activities described under section 9843(d) of title 42 U.S. Code.

[9]42 U.S.C. § 9835(a)(2)(C)(i)(I)(cc).

[10]42 U.S.C. § 629e(c)(1).

[11]HHS provides this directly or by grant to or contract with public or private agencies or organizations. 42 U.S.C. 5113(b)(4).

[12]HHS may provide this directly or by grant to or contract with public or private agencies or organizations. 42 U.S.C. §5113(d)(2)(B).

[13]These services and programs are directly related to the safety, permanence, or well-being of a child or preventing a child from entering foster care. 42 U.S.C. § 671(e)(1).

also disseminate best practices with respect to the provision of these services and programs, including how to plan and implement a well-designed and rigorous evaluation of a promising, supported, or well-supported practice.[14] Appendix IV lists the 2018 fiscal year obligation amounts for technical assistance for each of the selected HHS/ACF grant programs.

DOL, Employment and Training Administration: Under funding authorized for dislocated worker employment and training activities, DOL must reserve 20 percent for dislocated worker technical assistance and other specified grants, projects, and activities related to dislocated workers.[15] Under statute, not more than 5 percent of this reserved amount is required to be used to provide technical assistance to states that do not meet state performance accountability measures for the primary indicators of performance with respect to employment and training activities for dislocated workers.[16] These amounts reserved may also be used to provide for staff training, including specialists who provide rapid response services. Such training shall include instruction in proven methods of promoting, establishing, and assisting labor-management committees.[17]

Under the YouthBuild program, DOL is required to enter into contracts with or make grants to one or more qualified national nonprofit agencies to provide training, information, technical assistance, program evaluation, and data management to recipients of YouthBuild grants.[18] DOL is required to reserve 5 percent of the funds appropriated for the YouthBuild program to carry out these activities.[19] Appendix IV lists the 2018 fiscal

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[14]42 U.S.C. 676(d)(1).

[15]29 U.S.C. §§ 3181(c) and 3172(a)(2)(A).

[16]Funds may also be used to assist grantees in promoting continuous improvement of assistance to dislocated workers. 29 U.S.C. § 3223(b)(1). Currently, Labor may reserve not more than 10 percent of such funds to provide technical assistance and carry out additional activities related to the transition to the WIOA. Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020, Pub. L. No. 116-94, H.R. 1865-5 (2019).

[17]29 U.S.C. § 3223(b)(2).

[18]29 U.S.C. § 3226(g)(2)(A).

[19]29 U.S.C. 3226(g)(2)(B).

year obligation amounts for technical assistance for each of the selected DOL/ETA grant programs.

Appendix IV: Technical Assistance Funding Information

Table 4 lists the fiscal year 2018 obligation amounts for the technical assistance projects and providers for each of the four selected Department of Education grant programs.

Table 4: Selected Department of Education Grant Programs, Examples of Technical Assistance (TA) Projects and Obligation Amounts for Fiscal Year (FY) 2018

Department of Education Grant Program	TA Project/Provider Examples	FY18 TA Obligation Amount
School Safety National Activities	Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance Center	$2,969,254
School Safety National Activities	National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE)	$2,670,509
School Safety National Activities	National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)	$3,749,999
Adult Education National Leadership Activities	The Literacy Information and Communications System (LINCS) Resource Collection	$1,023,845
Adult Education National Leadership Activities	Strengthening States Capacity to Scale Evidence-based Reading Instruction	$1,058,929
Adult Education National Leadership Activities	National Reporting System for Adult Education	$1,150,693
Adult Education National Leadership Activities	The Literacy Information and Communications System (LINCS) Professional Development Center	$952,770
Adult Education National Leadership Activities	Connecting English Language Learners with Career Pathways	$1,283,797
Adult Education National Leadership Activities	Implementing State-Adopted Challenging Content Standards in Adult Education	$964,840
Adult Education National Leadership Activities	Teaching Skills that Matter in Adult Education	$2,362,453
Adult Education National Leadership Activities	Supporting Excellence in Adult Education	$546,626
Special Education Technical Assistance and Dissemination to Improve Services and Results for Children with Disabilities	Center for Literacy for Leaders	$750,000
Special Education Technical Assistance and Dissemination to Improve Services and Results for Children with Disabilities	National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)	$1,850,000
Special Education Technical Assistance and Dissemination to Improve Services and Results for Children with Disabilities	Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE)	$750,000

Department of Education Grant Program	TA Project/Provider Examples	FY18 TA Obligation Amount
Special Education Technical Assistance and Dissemination to Improve Services and Results for Children with Disabilities	National Center on Deaf-Blindness (NCDB)	$2,100,000
Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems	Privacy Technical Assistance Center (PTAC)	$1,658,109
Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems	Education Data Technical Assistance Program (EDTAP)	$4,196,981

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Education information and responses to questions regarding technical assistance funding. | GAO-20-580

Table 5 below lists the fiscal year 2018 obligation amounts for technical assistance for each of the selected Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families grant programs.

Table 5: Selected Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (HHS/ACF) Grant Programs and Technical Assistance (TA) Obligation Amounts for Fiscal Year (FY) 2018

HHS/ACF Office	Selected HHS/ACF Programs	FY18 TA Obligation Amount
Office of Head Start	Head Start Program	$235,973,962
Children's Bureau	Promoting Safe and Stable Families	$8,759,413
Children's Bureau	Adoption Opportunities	$17,750,194
Children's Bureau	Title IV-E Foster Care, Prevention, and Permanency	$3,070,700

Source: GAO analysis of HHS/ACF information regarding technical assistance funding. | GAO-20-580

Table 6 below lists the fiscal year 2018 obligation amounts for technical assistance for each of the selected Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration grant programs.

Table 6: Selected Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration (DOL/ETA) Grant Programs and Technical Assistance (TA) Obligation Amounts for Fiscal Year (FY) 2018

DOL/ETA Programs	Technical Assistance Providers	FY18 TA Obligation Amount
Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Dislocated Worker National Reserve Technical Assistance and Training	Multiple TA Providers	$1,540,000
YouthBuild	YouthBuild USA	$4,006,736

Source: GAO analysis of DOL/ETA information regarding technical assistance funding. | GAO-20-580

Appendix V: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

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Staff Acknowledgments

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