

experience with technical assistance in this context is discussed and analyzed. Finally, we consider some of the conditions in which technical assistance works best in community development.

Perhaps more than other community development approaches, technical assistance raises numerous ethical and professional issues for practitioners. Technical assistance providers need to guard against maintaining the power structure in communities and undermining the capacity of communities to solve their own problems. These challenges are discussed and proposals for handling these dilemmas are reviewed.

Case Study 4.1 Engineering Projects in Service-Learning

The Engineering Projects in Community Service program was created at Purdue University to allow students to gain experience in communicating and working with people of varying social backgrounds. Students are given long-term design goals and are allowed to participate in the program for multiple semesters. Projects are multidisciplinary, and teams are large and diverse in terms of age and experience. This results in high gains for participants in skills like teamwork, communication, resourcefulness, and professionalism. When a project partner is initially found, a team is organized around it and must first come up with the long-term project goals. After a proposal is approved, the project moves forward for as many semesters as are necessary until completion, with a final goal of supplying a successful system to the project partner. Successful systems include a modified telephone for children with disabilities, thermal imaging of houses to determine energy efficiency for Habitat for Humanity, and an improved computer network for a local health care service.

SOURCE: Tsang, E. (Ed.). (1999). *Projects that matter: Concepts and models for service-learning in engineering*. Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education.

Understanding the Technical Assistance Approach

From a technical assistance position, the scientific method is highly valued, advances in technology are considered signs of progress, and rational planning in the decision-making process is a corollary of the scientific method. Indeed, planning is a prized process, and the collection and analysis of data are important elements in that process. It is assumed that all situations can be analyzed objectively and that bad decisions are frequently a result of poor planning.

In the technical assistance approach, technical know-how is assumed to be good because efficiency is a valued end. New technology may be uncritically accepted as a better way of doing things. Technology transfer is often defined as the process of effectively communicating or marketing the technology’s benefits to potential users. However, full attention may not be given to the technology’s fit to the sociocultural context and the dysfunctional consequences that may come about because of its introduction.

A community’s official power structure is usually the employer or sponsor of technical assistance work. Economic growth or improvement of the physical infrastructure is typically the focus of attention; advancing community-based capacity may or may not be a central concern. Local resources—physical and human—may or may not be drawn upon during the assistance episode.

Comparisons of Technical Assistance, Self-Help, and Conflict Approaches

The three major themes of community development—technical assistance, self-help, and conflict—generally parallel the approaches to planned change. For example, in comparing schools of thought about planned change, Crowfoot and Chesler (1976) discuss the countercultural (self-help) perspective, the professional-technical (technical assistance) perspective, and political (conflict) perspective. In a discussion of the primary areas of community organization in social work, Rothman (1974b) identifies three approaches: locality development (self-help), social planning (technical assistance), and social action

(conflict). Chin and Benne (1976) consider three strategies of planned change: the normative-re-educative (self-help), the empirical-rational (technical assistance), and the power coercive (conflict).

A unifying theme of the approaches (or perspectives) is that they differ in a number of fundamental areas. Crowfoot and Chesler (1976), for instance, emphasize ideological distinctions by showing how the approaches vary in their response to very basic, value-laden questions: What are their general images of society? What are their general images of the individual? What are their diagnoses of contemporary society? What are their priorities with regard to change? Rothman focuses on selected practice variables, including salient practitioner roles; differential conception of the client's role, tactics, and techniques; and orientation toward the community power structure. A comparative analysis of the approaches is presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Self-Help, Technical Assistance, and Conflict as Planned Approaches

<i>Planned Change Approaches</i>			
<i>Factor</i>	<i>Self-Help</i>	<i>Technical Assistance</i>	<i>Conflict</i>
Image of society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dehumanized • Mechanical 	Bureaucratic organizations with authority figures	Groups constantly struggle to maintain or add to their power base
Image of individual	Inherently good but goodness is suppressed	System-defined players and roles	Oppressed
Assumption examples	People have the right and ability to identify and solve collective problems	Science provides means to solve problems	Power is the most basic of all resources
Core problem to be addressed	Capacity of people to take collective action	Capacity to harness science to solve human problems	Concentration of power in the hands of a few persons
Examples of action goals	Community capacity building	Technical problem solving	Redistribution of power

SOURCE: Adapted from Rothman (1974b), Chin and Benne (1976), and Crowfoot and Chesler (1976).

The differences described by these authors are worthy of note, especially for students and practitioners of technical assistance. For our purposes, a useful distinction may be drawn between self-help and conflict, on one hand, and technical assistance on the other hand. Both the self-help and conflict approaches fix attention on human and collective development. Community residents are expected to come together, identify problems through mutual agreement, and mobilize change that is fundamental to technical assistance. Collective action is just as important—perhaps more important—than the products derived from the change episode. That is, the process of collective action represents a literal learning laboratory where persons can expand their repertoires of community change skills. Self-help and conflict practitioners are successful (other things being equal) to the extent that they possess well-developed process skills—something emphasized in the literature on practice roles (Bennett, 1973).

Indeed, the differences between the technical assistance approach and selfhelp and conflict approaches are often more than superficial. For example, because the power structure is the employer or sponsor of technical assistance efforts, citizens are frequently not seen as consumers or end users. The concept of residents as consumers or clients is also frequently eschewed in the self-help approach. In the conflict literature, residents are often described as the victims of social inequalities and injustices. Similarly,

members of the local power structure are collaborators, at best, and “blockers,” at worst, in the self-help approach; they are oppressors to those who espouse the conflict approach.

Types of Technical Assistance

Is it possible to classify technical assistance by type? We believe it is, and two classifications will be discussed here: (a) use of power actors to achieve goals; or (b) as a strategy used by consultants or volunteer leaders as developmental activity.

Technical Assistance and Power Actors. Technical assistance relationships—and decisions to enter into them—may vary according to the auspices under which they are organized and the impetuses for undertaking technical assistance. The power sources under which technical assistance is provided can be categorized as (a) *legislation*—having the powers to create, legislate, and appropriate; (b) *administration*—having the power to manipulate resources, knowledge, and information; (c) *education*—having the knowledge, skills, and processes of a specialized nature associated largely with educational and research institutions; (d) *collaborators*—creating mechanisms, often mutually, for the specified purpose of providing or enhancing technical assistance in the recipient’s domain; and (e) *consultants*—generally, performing specific tasks by private consultants.

The sources for offering technical assistance—how it finds its way into a recipient’s domain—can be categorized in the following ways: (a) imposed (i.e., thrust on the recipient unilaterally from the outside); (b) negotiated (i.e., reached by mutual consent); or (c) most importantly, a community activity initiated by those who perceive that there is such a need.

Nondevelopmental and Developmental Technical Assistance

Although technical assistance essentially involves the acquisition of problemsolving resources, the rationale for the resource exchange and the nature of the relationship between the provider and the recipient are critically important issues if we are to view technical assistance as a theme of community development. Contemporary technical assistance efforts are predominantly associated with the desire of the provider to enable recipients to do what they are incapable of doing or unwilling to do on their own. That is, the provider is committed to some goal that, if it is to be attained, requires an adoption of particular skills or technologies by the recipient. Additionally, the provider is unwilling to wait for “natural” (communication, travel) means of transfer to reach the recipient and is unwilling or unable to directly take over the recipient’s responsibilities.

These points are essentially captured in the basic assumptions of technical assistance:

1. Someone knows something about the issues that another does not know.
2. Someone decides that the potential recipient needs assistance.
3. A provider-recipient relationship can be established.
4. The provider provides and the receiver receives.

Given this backdrop, it can be argued that technical assistance, although an important approach to planned change, may or may not be an approach (or theme) of community development. Technical assistance as a nondevelopment approach to change is generally described by Batten (1975) in his discussion of the directive approach to group and community work as follows:

The directive approach means that the agency ... decides whatever ...it thinks people need or ought to value or ought to do for their own good, and sometimes how they ought to behave. These decisions become the agency’s goal for people. The agency will then provide whatever staff, equipment, premises, and programmes it thinks are needed to meet the needs or interest of the people it wishes to help, in the hope that they will avail themselves of the services or activities it provides. This will bring

them into contact with the agency's workers who will then try to influence people in relation to the agency's ideas of betterment for them.... The agency and its workers think, decide, plan, organize, administer, and provide for people. Always the main initiative, and the final say, remain with them. (p. 5)

Christenson and Robinson's (1980) widely quoted definition describes community development as the shared decision by community residents to initiate a planned change process. When conceptualized through this filter, technical assistance involves the residents' desire to accept assistance because of its fundamental importance for improving the locale's social, economic, and/or physical environment. Outside assistance is therefore necessary and appropriate. In addition, legitimate representatives of the community collaborate with the external change agents (i.e., those providing the assistance) as change agents on the "planning change team." This collaboration is based on a mutually agreeable set of role relationships. If these elements are in place, then it is possible for technical assistance to be compatible with the Oberle, Stowers, and Darby (1974) definition of development as the "process in which increasingly more members of a given area or environment make and implement socially responsible decisions" (p. 61). This approach to technical assistance can be classified as the developmental approach.

Perhaps the basic difference between technical assistance as a nondevelopmental and developmental approach to planned change rests with values. In reviewing the definition and assumptions associated with technical assistance, a development ethicist such as Goulet (1977) might pose the question: Who decides what assistance will be provided to whom, how, and when? In this realm, value-oriented questions may be raised—questions that surround the issues of goal selection, problem definition, means selection, and assessment of consequences (Kelman & Warwick, 1978):

1. Whose values are to be served by the intervention?
2. To what extent do the recipients have an opportunity to participate in the choice of the goals?
3. To what extent does the process enhance the power of the target population to solve problems?
4. To what extent is the provider engaging in a self-serving activity?
5. Whose problem(s) is (are) being primarily addressed in the technical assistance episode: the provider's or the recipient's?
6. Is a reasonable set of alternatives available to the recipient? Does the recipient have the power of choice? If so, does the provider assist the recipient in making informed choices?
7. Is incomplete or distorted information presented about the effects of assistance? Or, are only the probable benefits emphasized? Indeed, does the provider know, understand, and communicate the probable sociocultural, economic, environmental, and psychological impacts?
8. Will the assistance create a dependency relationship between the donor and receiver?

For example, if assistance is knowledge-induced (knowledge in search of an application) or profit-induced (knowledge primarily or exclusively transferred with a profit motive in mind), then development is not likely to be served. To the extent that the recipient fully participates—indeed, is at least a co-owner—of the assistance process, developmental technical assistance is possible. The fundamental importance of these questions and shaping the process leading to the answers need to be emphasized because technology transfer characterizes much of what we know as technical assistance. Technology transfer, according to Glaser, Abelson, and Garrison (1983), is the application of knowledge or technology by a new user.

From our perspective, technology transfer may or may not be a means of development. Technology of itself is equivocal, according to Glaser and his colleagues. The reasons for its application, and the consequences of its use, typically define the relative goodness and badness of the transfer in development terms. That is why different evaluators can advance very different—sometimes incompatible—criteria to evaluate the process and its effects. Glaser et al. (1983) emphasize the need to consider the impacts from a developmental point of view:

Technology is defined as more than technique—that is, more than science and engineering. It encompasses the totality of specialized means, including those of management, administration, and public policy, used to develop goods or services for human sustenance and comfort. Technology also has deeper anthropological meaning. It is a key element of culture; it determines the relationship of a community with its natural environment, and is the most concrete expression of values (Wenk, 1979). Sooner or later, each society that strives to upgrade its technical capability discovers that it is both unfeasible and socially counterproductive simply to paste a veneer of technology onto indigenous culture. Hence, transfers of technology require a high sensitivity to match technical resources congenially not only with social goals but also with infrastructural, or cultural/social, foundations. (p. 383)

Using Technical Assistance as a Community Development Activity

Given this background, we believe that technical assistance exists at both ends of a continuum: It exists at both nondevelopmental and developmental modes of planned change. At one extreme, technical assistance involves imposing assistance, technology, information, or ways of thinking on a community. Community involvement exists at best for appearances or legitimation. At worst, it serves the purpose of the co-optation. Conversely, as a developmental model, it is a vital and necessary approach to community development: recipients need assistance, donors are able and willing to provide it, and recipients regulate the assistance process in self-protective ways. The challenge to community development scholars and practitioners rests not in debating whether technical assistance is community development; our argument is that it is not. In our opinion, the field is better served by uncovering (a) when technical assistance is an appropriate approach to community development, and (b) how the community developer may effectively implement the developmental mode of technical assistance.

Technical Assistance as an Appropriate Approach to Community Development

The concept of appropriateness occupies a central place in the vocabulary of community development. Being able to analyze a situation and determine how to proceed appropriately are essential community development skills.

What this means is that technical assistance has its place as an approach to community development. Where? The concept of reliance on local resources and indigenous capacity is stressed again and again in the community development literature. However, the notion of complementing these resources (when necessary) with outside resources and assistance is also emphasized in the literature. It is naïve to believe that all of the resources necessary for all successful community actions are available within the local setting. Community leaders often need resources (e.g., money, technology, advice, person power) that exist outside the locale.

Technical Assistance as Community Development

The developmental question that looms large is this: How is it possible to acquire, direct, and control outside resources in ways that are consistent with local values and preferences? The tail-wagging-the-dog scenario in technical assistance comes to pass when the cost of external resource mobilization is such that it subverts the residents' ability to build capacity. The challenge to technical assistance as community development is that it takes place within a *process* whereby local people have an opportunity to enhance their individual and collective problem-solving abilities. This is the same challenge facing self-help and conflict as community development. The basic difference is that both of these latter approaches are inherently absent in the technical assistance approach, but they must be added to the approach if community development is to occur.

The collective capacity-building notion is equivalent to the opportunity to enhance the sense of community in the locale. Frequently in community development, we naively assume—sometimes with disastrous consequences—that sufficient levels of community exist, in the psychological and sociological senses, so that all practitioners need to do is focus attention on the substantive problem(s) at hand. In the developmental sense, levels of community vary with the extent that people socially and psychologically identify with the locale and aspire to strengthen its capacity to solve problems (Cottrell, 1977).

In self-help community development, the fundamental task of people wanting to come together to deal with common problems assumes that sufficient levels of community exist. We know from experience that people often do not participate in self-help opportunities because of their belief that an alternative means of action can provide needed resources more quickly and effectively (Rothman, 1974a; Rothman, Erlich, & Teresa, 1976). Similarly, lower levels of community may exist in precisely those environments where community organizing (the conflict approach) would seem most appropriate. This may be primarily because feelings of collective powerlessness—frequently expressed as fatalism and apathy—are often ubiquitous in disadvantaged environments. Much of Alinsky’s work focused on describing tactics that organizers can use to bring people together effectively and enhance the sense of community for the purpose of taking collective action (Alinsky, 1971). This often involved using local institutions (e.g., faith-based organizations) as a medium to broaden the sense of community.

Nondevelopmental technical assistance does not require the existence of high levels of community. Outside change agents can “do for” the community because community capacity building is not a goal. At times, community members even request such a structure. External assistance, in this case, is not viewed as a means to capacity-building, but as an end in itself. This is precisely when technical assistance is not community development but simply an approach to planned change.

In technical assistance as community development, practitioners must resist playing a service delivery role only. Recognition of the existing sociocultural environment and the leadership structure, and an understanding of the consequences of extending assistance, are imperative (Truman, Grether, Vandenberg, & Fear, 1985). For example, are the potential dysfunctions of the technical assistance considered prior to the initiation of the assistance process? To what extent will the leadership structure be affected by the assistance process?

To further enhance technical assistance as community development, we recommend that greater attention be given to (a) increasing the instances where technical assistance is subsumed under one of the other approaches to community development, and (b) considering how technical assistance can be serially joined with other approaches.

In the first case, this would mean delivering technical assistance as part of a larger self-help or conflict process. Opportunities exist to accomplish this goal, although they are often missed. On the other hand, political realities of agency agendas may preclude this, especially with respect to linking technical assistance with conflict. A recent experience of one of the authors comes to mind. Research services (to be offered by a publicly funded university) were requested by a community group to document the supposed unjust and arbitrary decision by a local school district to close its neighborhood elementary school. The researcher providing the assistance quickly found himself in several confrontational sessions with representatives of the city power structure, most notably the superintendent of schools.

The serial linking of technical assistance with other approaches to community development appears to be a more politically reasonable option, especially for organizations involved in longer-term development efforts within specific community settings. The experience of nongovernmental organizations that provide assistance in the developing world is that they constantly struggle with choices between relief and development. Faith-based organizations are ideologically drawn to the self-help notion of community development as a medium for holistic development, but also search for ways to break out of the seemingly vicious cycle of providing relief with development even though technical assistance is very much needed. This suggests that technical assistance is being viewed only as a nondevelopmental approach. The temporal sequencing of developmental technical assistance (first) with self-help (later) would seem to be a strategy for providing emergency services within a long-term developmental thrust.

Alliband (1983), a developmental writer, argues that both nondevelopmental *and* developmental technical assistance are needed in the developing world because “each one works to solve different problems and to address the problems of different socio-economic groups” (p. 3). On one hand, when considering Third World agricultural development, he believes that many larger farmers stand ready to

power because any productive use of it is better than letting it lie idle. In other words, we must learn to recognize our boundaries. A project that does not fit, educationally and organizationally into an environment, will be a failure and a cause of disruption. (as quoted in Dunn, 1979, p. 1)

Dunn (1979) conceptualizes appropriate technology as technology that is community-based, is small to moderate in scale, and includes the following characteristics: (a) is labor-intensive, (b) is amenable to management by its users, (c) encourages local innovativeness, (d) is compatible with local values and customs, (e) helps meet local needs, (f) contributes to local self-sufficiency, and (g) relies on local human and natural resources.

Even those who advocate appropriate technology as an approach to technical assistance might agree that the more we attempt to impose technical assistance from the outside, the more we come to realize it does not work as often or as well as those involved had hoped it would. The World Bank (Cernea, 1985) and other international development assistance groups are finding this to be the case, and they are realizing the importance of defining projects from the points of view of the clients, rather than from the points of view of the technical assistance teams who assess the situations. The international experiences are equally germane to the United States.

This suggests—and, indeed, there is evidence—that developmental thinking is creeping into the writing and practice of those who would classify neither themselves as community developers nor their work as community development. The reason is that experience has revealed that developmental thinking is vitally important for “effective” (i.e., putting into place) technical assistance whether it be embodied (artifact-based) or disembodied (conceptual) in nature (cf. Egea, 1975).

From this point of view, the considerable research that has been conducted on the factors that are associated with planned change must be reviewed carefully. Zaltman (1983) believes that consensus is beginning to emerge from research and that the successful practice of planned change can be described in a compact set of concepts and guidelines. A convergent validity seems to exist, according to Zaltman, because the work in diverse disciplines seems to be pointing to the same general conclusions about what works in the field.

Among the numerous to summarize what is known about the successful practice of change is the well-known and frequently cited work of Davis and Salasin (1975). Based on their work in the mental health field, these authors have developed an eight-factor framework, arranged as an acronym: “A V-I-C-T-O-R-Y.” Each letter represents a factor that change agents should consider when designing and implementing planned change projects. Note that literally every element in the framework addresses one or more of the developmental aspects discussed in this chapter.

A V-I-C-T-O-R-Y

Ability: The ability of members of the target system to understand and evaluate the assistance being offered.

Values: The degree of fit between the assistance party and the target system’s philosophy and operating style.

Information: The adequacy of the target system’s knowledge and understanding of the assistance process to be used.

Circumstances: The extent to which those offering the assistance understand the target system’s sociocultural context.

Timing: The ability of the party offering assistance to consider the optimal timing for structuring the change process.

Obligation: The need for the assistance party to consider the change from the target system’s point of view, particularly in terms of whether or not the change relates to one or more of their felt needs.

Resistance: The assistance party should understand and appreciate the myriad of forces—cultural, social, organizational, and psychological—that may lead to change resistance.

Yield: The benefits and payoffs to the end user(s) if the change is implemented.

Zaltman (1983) has extended the utility of the framework by creating a set of principles and propositions that fine-tunes the requirements associated with successful planned change. With respect to ability, for example, planners are advised that it is important for them to distinguish between client inability that can be altered and those that are relatively fixed and to which they must adapt. The more unalterable a client's inability is, Zaltman counsels, the more change agents should focus on innovation-related alterations and less on client-related alterations.

Concluding Observations

We have argued that technical assistance is the only theme or approach to community development that is not inherently developmental in nature. In some places, technical assistance has been used inappropriately in the name of community development. To be community development, technical assistance activities must conform to the underlying tenets expressed earlier in this chapter and volume, namely, that it take place within a larger process where community residents make a shared decision to initiate a planned change process—a process that is based on a mutually agreeable set of role relationships between community members and outside providers.

Contemporary emphasis on the “people component” of development is reflected in literature and practice (Korten & Klaus, 1984; Pulver & Dodson, 1992). It suggests the timeliness of the developmental approach to technical assistance. To take advantage of this situation, community development must use its value-oriented, normative base as the foundation for “sciencing” the technical assistance process. This means carefully documenting processes and results as well as testing process alternatives. In many fields, this recognition that technical assistance should be grounded in community participation is widely accepted. Most professionals in the community planning field now recognize the value and importance of this dimension. In other professions, however, there is less value placed on the role of community participation in technical assistance. Part of the problem may be that many professions do not have adequate models for how they may engage the community in this respect.

What this all signifies, at least to us, is that community development professionals who provide technical assistance must prove themselves to be worthy colleagues in the community development arena. The potential of technical assistance has already been recognized; the community development way of thinking is being increasingly viewed as relevant, appropriate, and necessary. Now the challenge becomes one of “delivering the goods,” that is, producing efficient and effective results. Brokensha's (1968) assertions that community development is known for its “murky banalities and half-truths” must be invalidated. The very future of technical assistance in the community arena as an objective scholarly enterprise hinges on disproving its murky banalities and half-truths.

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