



TECHNICAL REPORT:

Evaluation of Technical Assistance Services Provided by the ADA National Network

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Executive Summary

The ADA National Network provides information, guidance and training on how to implement the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in order to support the mission of the ADA to “**assure equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities.**”

Technical assistance (TA) specialists within the network are the frontline experts who provide information and guidance to a wide range of audience who have rights and responsibilities under the ADA. They translate complex ADA laws, policy, and regulations into usable information at the local level.

This technical report summarizes the ways these specialists support ADA implementation and identifies strategies for strengthening their role within the network.

TA specialists draw from a range of information and consultation sources to address information requests.

While TA specialists do not use a standardized process when providing TA, they all pull and synthesize information from a variety of national and local government sources, and often consult with other TA specialists, federal agency liaisons, or other ADA expert in their networks before responding to TA requests. The TA listserv was identified as an invaluable resource for sharing expertise and resources within the network.

Each TA response is tailored to the requester’s ADA knowledge level and situation to be useful.

Requesters of TA range from a person with a newly acquired disability who has never heard of the ADA, to an experienced ADA professional such as an ADA coordinator or compliance officer. TAs must assess and respond to each unique case to ensure information provided is relevant and understandable.

ADA questions have become more complex and nuanced in recent years.

In general, the audiences requesting TA have become more knowledgeable about the ADA and implementation questions have become more sophisticated in the past decade – often requiring TA specialist to conduct research before providing a complete response.

Basic ADA information is more readily available online, and there are more professionals with expertise in the ADA (e.g., human resources, architects, etc.) who are encountering complexities when working to implement the ADA.

TA specialists identified a number of emerging topics areas such as the ADA and the criminal justice system.

TA specialists noted that they are receiving more requests for ADA information on a range of new topic areas, including the criminal justice system, health care, the education system, online accessibility, and mental health.

Three themes were identified across multiple interview questions

1. TA specialists serve as a bridge between federal agencies and local actors working to implement the ADA.
2. TA specialist knowledge and referral resources expand beyond the ADA to facilitate ADA implementation.
3. The evolving ADA landscape is requiring TA specialists to address more complex questions in new emerging topics areas.

Recommendations to strengthen the role of TA specialists

Develop new informational resources including:

- A national list/directory of financial resources for PWD.
- Factsheets and training on the intersection of the ADA and other federal laws (e.g., FHA).
- National vs. state law factsheets that provide a side by side comparison of federal and state laws and regulations on select topics (e.g., accessible parking requirements).
- National factsheets adapted for a specific target audience/sector (e.g., What are accessible parking requirements for apartment managers? How does the ADA apply to casinos on Native American reservations?).
- Synthesis and plain language summary of court case decisions by topic area/trends (e.g., court cases on accessible online education programs).
- Subscription to national case law database (like LexusNexis or WestLaw) that all TA specialists can access.
- Develop process to keep national ADA Coordinators list current.
- Develop system to connect TA specialists within the network to topic experts.

Develop and provide training:

- Training on best TA practices.
- Advanced moderated training courses.
- Training and information on emerging ADA topics (e.g., criminal justice, web accessibility).

Make system-level improvements:

- Evaluate and make recommendations to improve key federal agency websites content and usability.
- Build and strengthen partnerships with government agencies (DOE, DOT, HUD) that develop and enforce regulations that intersect with the ADA.

Introduction

Evaluation objectives

Technical assistance specialists within the ADA National Network (ADANN) are the frontline experts in translating complex ADA laws, policy, and regulations into usable information for a wide variety of audiences. Little is known about the role of technical assistance (TA) specialists in supporting ADA implementation, their experience and insights on how ADA information needs are changing, and how best to address these needs nationally and at the regional level.

This qualitative evaluation project aimed to explore the role of TA specialists as *knowledge translators*, specifically to achieve the following objectives:

- Increase understanding of the needs of recipients of TA services.
- Increase understanding of how TA specialists address ADA information needs to support ADA implementation.
- Identify strategies, resources and tools to support TA specialists within the ADANN.

Knowledge translation

There are multiple definitions and models of knowledge translation (KT) (Sudsawad, 2007), most of which have been developed for application within the health sector. The definition that was developed by the funding agency of ADANN, NIDILRR (formerly NIDRR), states: *The multidimensional, active process of ensuring that new knowledge gained through the course of research ultimately improves the lives of people with disabilities, and furthers their participation in society. The process is active, as it not only accumulates information, but it also filters the information for relevance and appropriateness and recasts that information in language useful and accessible for the intended audience. (U.S. Department of Education, 2006, p. 8195)*

For this evaluation project, we are examining the role of TA specialists as key actors in the knowledge translation process. Intermediaries between knowledge producers and users have been often called *knowledge brokers*. While it is anticipated that TA specialists will fulfill many of the activities of knowledge brokers that have been identified in the literature (Bornbaum, 2015), differences are also likely to emerge that are unique to the content (ADA and disability knowledge) and context (ADANN).

Knowledge brokering activities that are likely to apply to TA specialists include:

- Identify and obtain relevant information
- Create tailored knowledge products
- Support communication and information sharing
- Network development, maintenance and facilitation (particularly with regional networks)

Methods

Development & testing

The aims and evaluation questions were drafted by the primary author in collaboration with the ADAKTC team. Exploratory interviews were conducted in February 2015 with two TA specialists to ensure evaluation aims were clear and to test and refine interview questions.

Recruitment

The ADA Regional Directors from all 10 regions identified 1-3 TA specialists as possible participants in evaluation. The only inclusion criterion was that TA specialists had to be working at a regional center for at least 6 months.

The ADAKTC team sent selected TA specialists a description of the evaluation project and an invitation to participate in an interview.

Data collection

TA specialists who agreed to participate in an interview were asked to complete a brief online survey that captured demographics. Research aims and interview questions were sent to participants prior to interview (see Appendix A - Interview Questions).

At the beginning of the phone interview, participants were asked permission to audio record phone interviews for use in analysis, and the purpose of the evaluation was reiterated.

Semi-structured phone interviews using the question guide were conducted by two evaluators between March and June 2015, and averaged 50 minutes in length. Evaluators took field notes during each interview to concisely capture participant responses, and audio recordings were made, with permission, for all interviews.

Analysis

Evaluator listened to all audio recordings to complete and clarify field notes – creating summaries that were organized by the ten interview questions and ‘other’ topics.

Interview summaries were sent back to participant to ensure accuracy and completeness, and solicit any additional feedback to interview questions. Two of the 17 participants were no longer serving as TA specialists within the ADANN and did not respond to request to review and verify interview summaries.

A draft coding structure was developed deductively by using the ten interview questions and ‘other’ as the eleven primary codes, and inductively by coding topics and subtopics that emerged in the summary notes within the eleven primary codes and major themes that cut across multiple questions. The draft coding structure was applied on subset of interviews and refined based on review and feedback from ADAKTC team.

All interview summaries were imported into Nvivo 10 and auto-coded by question, and coded manually using a coding structure. Coded data was synthesized and written up by the lead authors into a preliminary report that aimed to capture the major and minor topics by questions and the overarching themes.

The preliminary report was then reviewed by ADAKTC team members to ensure coherence and clarity, and by interview participants to ensure accuracy of findings and achieve agreement on proposed recommendations.

Results

Participants

Seventeen TA specialists representing the ADANN participated in phone interviews. Over 70% of participants were females and nearly half (8 of 17) had served as TA specialists for ADANN for over 10 years.

Table 1. Participant characteristics

	n	%
Gender		
Female	12	71%
Male	5	29%
Years as TA Specialist		
1 to 5 yrs	4	24%
> 5 yrs to 10 yrs	5	29%
> 10 yrs to 15 yrs	5	29%
> 15 yrs	3	18%
Geographic region		
New England ADA Center	2	12%
Northeast ADA Center	3	18%
Mid-Atlantic ADA Center	1	6%
Southeast ADA Center	2	12%
Great Lakes ADA Center	2	12%
Southwest ADA Center	1	6%
Great Plains ADA Center	1	6%
Rocky Mountain ADA Center	1	6%
Pacific ADA Center	1	6%
Northwest ADA Center	3	18%

Summary of responses by question

Q1. What are the most common types of ADA information requests you receive?

TA specialists reported that they received a wide variety of TA requests in terms of topics, audiences, and types of guidance needed. One TA specialist states:

The variety of ADA information needs is stunning.

ADA and Non-ADA Topics

Service animals were the most consistently mentioned ADA topic area across all regions when TA specialists were asked to describe the most common types of TA requests they receive. TA specialists provided several potential explanations for why service animals is a prominent topic, including:

- There is a lot of confusion between emotional support, companion, and service animals;
- The topic is very complex:
 - Restrictions differ within different environments such as workplace, rental housing, air travel, public transportation;
 - Multiple laws apply to the service animal topic including Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA), Fair Housing Act (FHA); Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and sections the Rehabilitation Act;
- There is a lot of misinformation online.

TA specialists identified a number of more to less common ADA topic as shown in Table 1.

Table 2. TA Requests: Common ADA Topics

	ADA Topic Areas	Examples
More Common	Employment	employees trying to find out how to file complaint, person with disability at risk of losing their job, employers needing guidance on providing reasonable accommodation; ADA requirements for small businesses
	Housing	how to request accommodation, FHA-related
	Parking	accessible parking requirements for new development, place of employment, public accommodation/business, and rental housing
	Facility access	building codes/architectural standards, removal of architectural barriers, architects and builders ensuring compliance
Less Common	Criminal justice system	court system and the ADA, reasonable accommodation, and effective communication
	Health care	effective communication (e.g., who is required to pay for interpreters?)
	Transportation	accessible public transportation

Education	public and private schools and the ADA, reasonable accommodation
Voting	accessibility

TA information requests about non-ADA topics was another prominent theme that emerged when TA specialists were asked about the most common types of TA requests they receive. Non-ADA topics included non-ADA federal laws that covered persons with disabilities and/or intersected with the ADA (e.g., 501, 503, 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, FHA, Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), IDEA), and requests for social services or financial support.

Financial assistance was requested for vehicle or home modifications (e.g., accessible vans), assistive technology; and paying for utilities, housing, and food. Requests for financial assistance come mostly from people with disabilities and their family members. TA specialists reported responding to these requests for financial assistance by providing:

- Referrals to regional social service organizations, state AT programs, or CILs;
- A list of regional and national sources of financial assistance for disability-related needs.

One TA specialist provided the following comment on financial assistance requests:

The most common things we find people asking financial assistance for are home modifications and vehicle modifications. I think part of the reason for that is that there is nothing on a national level, that's consistent across the country, that is a real source for that kind of thing...It's a patchwork system out there and people are trying to piece together all these different programs. Sometimes there are public programs based on age, income, veterans status...or charity projects...just to get a ramp built on their house.

Audiences and Types of ADA Guidance Requested

People with disabilities were identified as the most common audience that requests TA across all regions and all major topic areas. Non-ADA topics, employment, facility access, service animals, and housing were mentioned specifically as receiving substantially more TA requests from people with disabilities than any other audience. One TA specialist stated:

I think we get an awful lot of questions from people with disabilities, in just navigating their lives.

While all regions reported receiving TA requests from a diverse range of audiences, TA specialists also identified audiences of repeat callers that would rely on the ADA regional center TA services for topic specific information more regularly. As two TA specialists commented:

There are Centers for Independent Living (CILs) that use us as there go-to resource when they have questions. They obviously know us. They usually have a pretty good grasp on a certain requirement but

want to run it by us...’Can I bounce this off you’. We certainly do a lot of that with CILs. I would say the same thing for ADA coordinators or human resource professionals...

We have always had a really good relationship with the design community and the building community so that lends itself to a lot of facility questions. That is probably due to need and probably a lot just due to the relationship, because we tried to establish the kind of relationship where an architect is going to pick up the phone and think ‘why don’t I just run my interpretation by the [regional] ADA center and see what they think’.

The diverse range of audiences served by TA specialists that were mentioned included:

- Parents of children with disabilities
- Friends and family members of people with disabilities
- Employers
- Business owners
- Architects
- Contractors
- Code Officials
- Landscape designers
- Attorneys
- ADA coordinators
- State agencies
- Apartment managers
- State and local agencies/government
- Centers for independent living

TA specialists reported a wide range of information needs and levels of ADA knowledge among audiences who are requesting ADA information and guidance. As one TA specialist commented:

It’s kind of across the spectrum, we are talking to people who for some reason have stumble upon us and don’t know anything at all about the ADA, and then the people who come to us for professional guidance and clarification.

TA specialists reported that TA requesters need to know how the ADA laws and information applied to their situation so it is generally not sufficient to just provide a ‘cookie cutter’ response such as sending them a national factsheet on the topic or link to the specific section of the ADA law. Each response must be tailored to the requester’s ADA knowledge level and situation to be useful.

Some of the ways in which TA guidance was tailored to address the needs of different TA

requesters included:

- Helping someone clarify what they need and what their ADA issue is who doesn't know which ADA questions to ask.
- Locating the most appropriate information and referral resources for someone.
- Teaching someone about the basics of the ADA who is not familiar with the ADA or other civil rights laws.
- Explaining the importance of terminology within the ADA and how it applies in practice.
- Helping someone understand and apply the ADA information they have gathered from other sources.
- Verifying or providing a second opinion to professionals with expertise in the ADA.

Q2. Have the types of TA requests changed since you started working with ADA National Network? In the past 6 months?

Changes over time

TA specialists with over 5 years' experience reported that the types of ADA questions have become more complex and nuanced over the years and that there has been a steady increase in TA requests. Explanations for the increase in complexity included:

- Increased internet use -
 - People who have simple ADA questions, can find answers by searching online (i.e., Google search) so do not need TA;
 - TA requesters who find misinformation online are confused about their obligations or rights which can make the TA more complex;
- Increased awareness and knowledge on the ADA - The public is more aware of the ADA and familiar with how the laws and regulations apply so the questions are more sophisticated, and less about the basics;
- Increased number of ADA experts - ADA coordinators, HR specialists, and other legal, and accessibility professionals have developed a high level of expertise on the ADA so questions from these expert audiences are likely to very complex;
- Increased ADA implementation -
 - Questions have become very specific to each situation of ADA implementation, instead of general and informational;
 - Implementation questions are more likely to require knowledge on the intersection of ADA with other national laws or regional regulations;

Three TA specialists commented on how TA requests have become more complex over time:

They [TA questions] used to be simple but not anymore, because the simple ones are easy to find on the internet. We get really, really complicated questions.

The types of questions are getting more complex. I believe people with disabilities, HR specialists, and others that implement the ADA

are more savvy about the ADA...The level of the questions and the complexity has increased as the years have gone by, and people have been educated in many ways: through their employer, in their community, with their HR specialists, with their own research on the web.

I think that this speaks to the success of the centers, because when you get questions that are that advanced, that usually means it involves some type of implementation, and a professional who either has a role of implementation or enforcement or mediation...

It was also noted that complex TA questions often require advanced knowledge, research skills, and consultation with other TA experts or federal enforcement agencies.

Spikes in TA

TA specialists reported receiving a higher volume of certain types of TA requests due to seasonal differences, changes in regulations, and key events, specifically:

Seasonal topics:

- Snow removal in winter;
- Emergency preparedness with tornado/hurricane season;
- Parents asking about students IEPs and ADA issues with returning to school in the fall.

We had a lot calls about people experiencing problems with snow not being removed...from residential settings, commercial settings, and colleges.

New regulations/laws:

- 2010 Standards;
- ABLE Act – while not ADA, this change in tax code for people with disabilities resulted in increased TA calls on this topic.

Events:

- Voting around regional and national elections;
- 25th ADA anniversary.

Non-ADA requests

TA specialists also reported received more non-ADA related requests overtime (>10 years) and in more recent years. Non-ADA requests include federal laws that covered persons with disabilities and/or intersected with the ADA, and requests for social services or financial assistance (as described on Pages 6-7).

Emerging topics/audiences

TA specialists mentioned a few types of TA requests that have increased recently which include the following topics/audiences:

- Criminal justice system - (i.e., courts and effective communication, prison letters, law enforcement and the ADA)
- Effective communication (i.e., sign language interpreters)
- Mental health
- TA requests from group homes
- Schools/education
- Online/web accessibility

As noted by one TA specialist on online accessibility:

We are getting more questions about online accessibility than ever. And that may have a lot to do with some of the lawsuits that have gone on in the past couple years – the private entities like Target, universities are particularly aware of this because they have so many of their programs online.

Q3. Can you describe the process that you use (what you do) during a typical call or email to address TA requests?

There were many more similarities than differences reported in how TA specialists respond to TA requests, and identify and manage their TA information sources. However, the TA process is not standardized across the regions and most TA specialists have developed their own unique catalogue of TA sources and systems for archiving past responses.

Process

TA specialists described a variety of sequential steps used in responding to TA calls. One structured approach identified was the ‘6-step process’ from the moderated ADA Basics course. A standardized process reported was the use of a TA form that included a step-by-step script.

We call it a 6-step process. First, you look at is this a qualified person with a disability...Then, you look at it is ADA, what title might apply...Then, does that particular entity have requirements...Then, you look at are there non-discrimination requirements that are in play in that particular situation....Then, I look at are there any defenses, which for lack of better term you can say excuses...Last thing in what we call the 6-step process, I might have to ask more questions to get a clearer picture of what is going on.

Research

Most TA requests required some amount of research to identify and compile information from multiple sources. More complex issues or topics that were less familiar to TA specialist required more research time - often more than 30 minutes.

TA specialists will often conduct the research and then call or email the requester back later that day of the following day.

Research often involves both pulling and synthesizing information from multiple web-based sources and consulting with other TA providers, federal agencies, or other ADA experts.

Sources of TA information

TA specialists rely on a wide variety of sources of ADA and ADA-related information. The most commonly identified sources included:

Static

- DOJ, EEOC and Access Board publications and websites
- ADANN materials and resources available through adata.org
- ADA regional center materials and resources
- Job Accommodation Network (JAN)
- Sources of other federal disability laws (FMLA, IDEA, 504)
- OMS resources

Interactive

- Internal discussions with other regional TA and region center staff
- Consultation with federal agency liaison
- TA listserv

The listserv for TA specialists is great. All of us at times, with one of those tricky TAs, we will throw it out to the national listserv and ask for others opinions. There is a couple times a week when someone throws something out there and I do that a lot.

TA specialists will use Google for a topical search but are cautious to only select information from credible sources.

Less commonly mentioned sources include:

- Resources available through HUD, DOE, DOT, FAA, DOL, and ICC websites.

Q4. How often do you provide information or resources that are specific to your region?

TA specialists across all regions reported that they frequently provide information and referrals that are specific to their region. The diversity across regions in terms of ADA-related laws, regulations, and disability resources, requires that TA specialists develop expertise and referral networks that are specific to their region, state, and even local community.

Common types of regional referrals mentioned were to:

- Centers for Independent Living
- Protection & Advocacy program
- Local government and social services that offer disability supports and services but not specifically ADA-related

Often TA specialists make referrals to individual contacts within organizations that they have established a good working relationship with over the years. As stated by one TA specialist:

One benefit of being here for 14 years is I have many relationships established. I can refer people to specific people with organizations and not just give a number.

Building codes and construction was mentioned by most TA specialists as a topic area that required state and local knowledge. Other topics mentioned included employment, housing, parking, emergency preparedness and how to file local ADA complaints.

Q5. Why do you think people contact your region for TA instead of other sources of ADA information?

A common explanation for why ADANN TA specialists were contacted instead of an alternative source of ADA information was that there is no similar alternative source available. All the following aspects were attributed to making the ADANN TA services unique from other sources of ADA information:

- You get a real person to talk or email with;
- TA is individualized to meet the need of each circumstance;
- No other comprehensive source of ADA TA exists that covers all aspects of the ADA; and provides information on how the ADA intersects with other federal disability laws (e.g., FHA, IDEA), and with regional and local laws and regulations.

TA specialists identified a variety of additional reasons for why people contact ADANN TA services, including:

- Good consumer service – responsive, helpful, follow-up;
- TA services are confidential;
- Trustworthy and accurate information is provided;
- ADANN is well-known, name recognition;
- Many repeat customers, relationships have been established;
- TA services are easy to locate when searching online;
- ADANN receives referrals from affiliates, federal agencies, and local social service and disability organizations.

As expressed in comments by two TA specialists:

They [caller] are surprised that there is a live person...‘I thought I was going to get an answering machine’, and they are so happy to talk to someone. A lot of time people are desperate when they are calling. They don’t know what to do, how to deal with an issue, they are talking it out and having somebody to give them some guidance, direction, find that information - that is really valuable.

There are times when I tell people, I don’t know that answer and I will get back to you, and I always do. I never do not return, follow up

and I think people appreciate that. 'I don't know let me do some research but I will get back with you'.

Q6. Can you discuss some of the challenges or barriers you have experienced in meeting TA requests?

Most TA specialists identified complex topics as a challenge when working to address TA requests. Types of complexities included the intersection between ADA and other federal laws, conflicts between federal and regional laws and regulations, new regulations (e.g., web accessibility), and nuances within the TA requesters situation. Employment, building codes, and service animals were mentioned as often involving complexities. One TA specialist described some of a reasons why employment topics can be challenging:

There is a lot of misinformation, and there are so many employment laws and how they intersect,... like where we are, we are in a 'right to fire' state, where you have limited state protections,...it's always difficult because it's on a case by case basis and you are never getting the whole picture...You are getting the perception of that individual (employee or employer)...The individual may be very afraid about losing a job, so there is a lot of emotions.

Communicating the limited role of TA specialists was also identified as a challenge as some requesters expect TA specialists to be advocates, provide legal advice, or even be able to file complaints on their behalf.

Other challenges identified by at least two regions included:

- Difficulty finding needed information to respond to TA requests because information is too fragmented or not available;
- Lack of timely response from federal agencies when TA specialists are needing clarification;
- Identifying most appropriate referrals for non-ADA information requests;
- Callers who are frustrated, aggressive, or upset.

Q7. What kinds of support would help you address these challenges?

TA specialists identified a range of training and information resources, as well as and support networks.

Training

Training topics areas included:

- Best practices in TA - Communicating the limited role of TA specialists, how to be neutral/objective, how to deal with difficult callers, consumer service skills.
- Research skills - gathering and synthesizing regional and national resources.
- Advanced moderated ADA webinars on complex topics such as building standards, and ADA intersection with other federal laws (e.g., FMLA, FHA, IDEA).

A few TA specialists recommended that national standards be developed for TA specialists, along with a national TA Manual. Regions have different strengths in training programs and resources for new TA specialists but these training tools have not been reviewed and adopted nationally.

Information resources

New and improved information resources identified included a national subscription to a high-quality case law database, plain language summaries of case law trends by topic, and resources lists.

Two subscription-based case law database mentioned were LexusNexus and WestLaw.

Paid subscriptions are easier because they filter out poor quality/laws that have been overturned. Right now I use free services (google scholar, justia.com, findlaw.com, leagle.com)

A few TA specialists recommended that the network develop plain language summaries of case law trends by topic so they could quickly understand the trends in national and state cases.

Resource lists identified included:

- Regularly updates list of ADA Coordinators
- List of financial resources for people with disabilities (e.g., home modifications, purchasing AT)
- List of disability services and supports available nationally (non-ADA)

Support networks

Sharing of information with other TA specialists within and across regions was identified as an invaluable resource, that is facilitated by the TA listserv. One TA specialist suggested that a system is developed to direct TA specialists who need information on a particular topic to those in the network with extensive expertise in that topic area. This would expand everyone knowledge base and facilitate a timely response when regions are not able to access federal agency liaisons quickly such as the Access Board or DOJ.

Access to contacts within federal agencies, namely DOJ, EEOC and Access Board, was identified as critical in meeting information needs, and in addressing the most complex cases. However, these relationships have not been developed with all agencies such as DOE, HUD and DOT.

Q8. Is it difficult to find useful information on specific topics? If so, which topics?

The majority of TA specialists reported that there was sufficient information available on most ADA topics, and a few specialists thought there was too much information which made it difficult to identify the most useful sources.

However, regionally or audience-specific resources were identified as an information gap. As one specialist expressed, these targeted resources are the 'middle ground' between generic national information (i.e., factsheets) and highly individualized and nuanced information that is provided through TA services. Additional information gaps are described in Table 2.

Table 3. ADA Information Gaps Identified by TA Specialists

Information gap	Description
ADA implementation information as it applies to regional/state laws and regulations	TA specialists explained that in order for regional and state actors to implement any part of the ADA, they must know how the national ADA law intersects with local laws and regulations (e.g., how are FMLA and ADA applied in my state? How does ADA apply to public transportation in my region).
ADA implementation information written for target audiences/entities	The implementation of the ADA by target audiences/entities (e.g., casinos, churches, airlines, parks & recreation, hotels) depends on these audiences understanding how to apply an ADA topic within their context.
Emerging ADA topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substance abuse/addiction and the ADA • Mental health and the ADA • Accommodations for students, accessible schools - ADA and IDEA for public, private, parochial, charter schools (i.e., show how each set of laws applies to different types of schools) • Reasonable accommodation within court system • New regulations on web accessibility
Information to address financial support requests	Given that the ADANN receives a high volume of TA requests from people with disabilities who are seeking financial assistance and referrals to social support resources, one TA specialist recommended that the ADANN create a resource lists of financial assistance options for people with disabilities. Two other TA specialists mentioned that need for information on financial assistance options for barrier removal such as building a ramp, and for purchasing assistive technology.
Federal website information and navigation	Some TA specialists mentioned that outdated or difficult to find ADA information on some of the federal websites. A specific request made was for updated ADA Checklists from DOJ and EEOC.
Less detail resources with links to more detailed information	E.g., Provide info on just what local small businesses need to know and disseminate that through chambers of commerce, then link to website with much more specific and detailed information.

I do believe that the TA is critical, and I think it is critical that it stays not on a national level but on a regional level because there is that interplay between local and federal law that is always there... I think the more we can take what we do for TA, and turn that into

meaningful information for target groups that they can access easily - the better.

Q9. What experience or skills are most important to be a TA specialist?

ADA Experience and Knowledge

Not one type of professional background was identified as most appropriate for becoming a TA specialist. Legal, architectural, human resources, vocational rehabilitation, and social services were all mentioned as backgrounds that could prepare someone for being a TA specialist. TA specialists will develop more ADA expertise in a 'niche' topic area where they excel due to professional background or interest (e.g., building code compliance). As one TA specialist commented:

In terms of background, the ADA is so broad that I would imagine that it's hard to find one person that excels in every area of the ADA. We all have our niches so I don't think there is one particular background that is better.

Developing a basic knowledge base that covers all ADA topics and related disability laws (e.g., FHA, ACAA, IDEA, Rehabilitation Act); and regional knowledge of laws and regulations, and local disability-related resources were also identified as important to providing effective TA. As one TA specialist comments:

The other federal laws that have protections for folks with disabilities... you really need to have a good solid foundation of what those laws state...and whether or not your state accessibility codes are different than the 2010 standards for accessible design...

Role of TA Specialists

Understanding the role of the TA specialists was also identified as important. TA specialists characterized their role as:

- Being an objective source of ADA information;
- Only providing trustworthy ADA information that is supported by DOJ and other federal agencies;
- Not providing legal guidance;
- Not serving as an advocate.

Skills and Attributes

TA specialists identified many skills and attributes that were important to serve in their position. Communication was a major theme which included listening skills, the ability to translate complex ideas simply, communicating clearly, and making sure information was understood. As one TA specialist commented:

To communicate things that may seem very complicated, in some case - to make it seem not so complicated.

Other important skills and attributes identified included:

- Patience
- Flexibility to address a wide variety of information needs (basic to very complex), and audiences
- Commitment to service, to provide useful information and guidance
- Writing skills
- Research, analysis, and synthesis skills
- Proficient use of internet/search features
- Willingness to learn, constantly expand knowledge and understanding of the ADA

As expressed by two TA specialists:

I would guess that the most important things would be the ability to listen, the willingness to help, not just to say 'sorry we can't help you'...and a lot of time the calls we get are people under duress, they are at the end of their rope. They may have called 10 agencies to get to you and they are stressed out - the ability to calmly talk and listen....and to respond with something that can be of use. Even if you can't solve the problem, you can be of assistance.

We provide it [ADA information] in a neutral way but also with some empathy.

Q10. What types of training are most important for TA specialists?

Getting Started as a TA Specialist

ADA Building Blocks course was identified as the most useful and valued training resource available for new TA specialists. The moderated format of the course facilitated the integration of course content into practice (i.e., responding to TA requests). As one TA specialist commented:

[ADA Building Blocks course] is great preparation for beginning the process.

Reading the ADA laws, regulations, and standards was also identified as 'fundamental' when starting out as a TA specialist. Learning about the basic ADA concepts within the law was identified as an important foundation to understanding the ADA.

If you are just starting out, you want to make sure you have a really good handle on these concepts and what the regulations say about them – such as effective communication, reasonable

accommodation, program access – you have to have those [concepts] down so all the other things makes sense. If you have some gaping holes, then you are going to miss some things, make some misinterpretations, or just not quite get it.

Regional training webinars and resources (e.g., toolkits) developed by the regional center on a variety of topics areas were also identified as a valuable training resource for both new and experienced TA specialists. Most regional training webinars are free and available online. As one TA specialist commented:

I recommend that new TA specialists attend as many [regional webinars] as they can.

On-the-job training and mentoring were identified as an effective approach to training new TA specialists. Mentoring approaches described included:

- Shadowing more experienced TA specialists by studying email questions and responses, listening and observing how calls were handled;
- Starting with email TA and having email responses reviewed by mentor before sending, and then graduating to receiving TA calls;
- Starting with responding to TAs within topic area of professional background (e.g., vocational rehabilitation), and expand to other topics with consultation from other TA specialists with broader ADA knowledge.

Additional training needs identified for new TA specialist include learning:

- State and local laws and codes;
- Regional resources and referrals;
- How to use the OMS;
- Where to locate commonly used ADA materials;
 - ADA materials identified as ‘most commonly used’ differed by region but generally would include materials from DOJ, EEOC, Access Board, and ADANN.
- How to conduct research, gather, and synthesize information from multiple sources;
- How to deal with challenging calls;
 - In crisis due to losing housing or job, suicidal;
 - Emotional, distressed;
 - Angry, verbally abusive.
- How to stay updated on new ADA information. As one TA specialist commented:

I think most important is training that keeps us up-to-date - when there is a new regulation or law...We have to be updated, have it [law, regulation] clarified, address our questions. We are the resource for many people so we need to stay up-to-date.

Ongoing Training Opportunities

A variety of ongoing training opportunities were identified as useful for all TA specialists, including the ADA Symposium, regional training webinars and resources, training opportunities provided by federal agencies and other national entities, and the TA workgroup webinars.

- The annual ADA Symposium was consistently mentioned as an important training opportunity for new and more experienced TA specialists for a variety of reasons including:
 - Exposure to wide variety of ADA topics;
 - Receiving updates directly from federal agencies, way to stay current;
 - Getting to know the people from federal agencies who enforce the laws,
 - Opportunities to dialogue, question and answer with federal officials, colleagues, and ADA experts.

The people that enforce the law – for example the DOJ - actually being there and saying ‘these are the regulations’. Hearing the information from the horse’s mouth.. ..The webcasts are good but the in-person allows for that dialogue back and forth with a live person, it has it’s benefits...That goes a long way. To put a face on the name.

- While regional training webinars and resources were mentioned more often as a valuable training for new TA specialists, more experienced TA specialists were also identified as benefitting as regional training opportunities serve as a ‘good refresher’ on important topic areas.
- Federal agency trainings and information provided by Access Board, DOJ, and EEOC help TA specialists stay up-to-date and better understanding how the ADA is being interpreted by federal agencies. A few valuable training resources mentioned by TA specialists included:
 - Federal agency trainings or Q & A sessions that are offered on changes in regulations (e.g., 2010 standard for sports arenas);
 - Access Board animations (<https://www.access-board.gov/guidelines-and-standards/buildings-and-sites/about-the-ada-standards/guide-to-the-ada-standards/animations>) and monthly conferences.
- ADA trainings provided by the Job Accommodation Network and the National Employment Law Institute were identified as useful.
- The TA workgroup webinars were valued because they provide TA specialists with access to ADA experts to can ask questions and discuss challenges.

For both new and experience TA specialists, it was noted that trainings for TA specialists needed to come from reliable and credible sources such as the ADANN and federal agencies, and not from any ADA trainings that are found when searching online.

Discussion

Three key themes emerged that capture the role of TA specialists in ADA implementation.

TA specialists serve as a bridge between federal agencies and local actors working to implement the ADA.

The implementation of the ADA at the regional level often requires expertise in local laws and regulations as well as connections to local resources, that are provided by TA specialists. They also translate complex federal laws into usable information that is tailored to address each circumstance of local actors.

Audiences served by TA specialists can rarely directly access federal agencies when complex questions arise so rely on TA specialists who have access to federal agency liaisons.

Finally, individual TA specialist often receive ADA information requests from repeat callers who have found this resource useful and trustworthy, and from local actors with established relationships who implement the ADA within their role (e.g., code compliance official, ADA coordinator).

You want to bring these large federal laws back home to people because they trust sources that are closer to them, they trust people they know.

TA specialists knowledge and referral resources expand beyond the ADA in order to facilitate ADA implementation.

TA specialists respond to the information needs of a wide variety of audiences and cover a breadth of ADA-related topics that require knowledge of national and local regulations and resources. They also serve as a referral hub to a vast array of information and resources that expands beyond the ADA, including federal laws that intersect with the ADA such as the Fair Housing Act, and financial and support services for people with disabilities.

The evolving ADA landscape in requiring TA specialists to address more complex questions and in new emerging topics areas.

ADA questions have become more complex and nuanced in recent years. The audiences requesting TA have become more knowledgeable about the ADA and implementation questions have become more sophisticated in the past decade – often requiring TA specialist to conduct research before providing a complete response. Basic ADA information is more readily available online, and there are more professionals with expertise in the ADA (e.g., human resources, architects, etc.) who are encountering complexities when working to implement the ADA.

TA specialists identified a number of emerging topics areas such as the ADA and the criminal justice system. TA specialists noted that they are receiving more requests for ADA information on criminal justice system, health care, the education system, online accessibility, and mental health.

Limitations

The small sample size of 17 TA specialists reduces the generalizability of results. However, there are approximately 40 TA specialists in the ADANN so the sample size comprises over 40% of total population.

The other major limitation was that the interview summaries were coded and analyzed by one researcher (RM).

ADANN Strategies: Recommendations

Strengthening Role of TA Specialists within ADANN

Develop New Informational Resources

- National list/directory of financial resources for PWD.
- Factsheets and training on intersection of ADA and other federal laws (e.g., FHA).
- National vs. state law factsheets that provide a side by side comparison of federal and state laws and regulations on select topics (e.g., accessible parking requirements)
- National factsheets adapted for target audience/sector (e.g., What are accessible parking requirements of apartment managers? How does the ADA apply to casinos on Native American reservations?)
- Synthesis and plain language summary of court case decisions by topic area – trends (e.g., Court cases on accessible online education programs).
- Subscription to national case law database (like LexusNexis or WestLaw) that all TA specialists can access.
- Develop process to keep national ADA Coordinators list current.
- Develop system to connect TA specialists within the network to topic experts.

Develop and Provide Training

- Training on best TA practices:
 - Develop National TA Manual.
- Advanced moderated training courses:
 - ADA and intersection with other federal laws
- Training and information on emerging ADA topics:
 - Mental health
 - Substance abuse
 - Criminal justice
 - Education
 - Web accessibility

System-Level Improvements

- Evaluate and make recommendations to improve key federal agency websites content and usability.
- Build and strengthen partnerships with government agencies (DOE, DOT, HUD) that develop and enforce regulations that intersect with the ADA.

Disclaimer

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Appendix

Table X. Interview questions

Questions	Probes
1. What are the most common types of ADA information requests you receive?	a. What topics? b. Who is making the requests?
2. Have the types of TA requests changed since you started working with ADA NN? In the past 6 months?	c. Simple vs. complex questions? d. What type of guidance are people requesting? e. What are the most common non-ADA requests you receive?
3. Can you describe the process that you use (what you do) during a typical call or email to address TA requests?	a. How do you clarify what information is needed? b. What are the information resources you rely on most often to address TA requests? c. Who do you consult when you need more information? d. How much research do you conduct during a typical TA? e. How do you document your TA interaction? f. How can we improve OMS data so it more accurately captures the TA process?
4. How often do you provide information or resources that are specific to your region?	a. What types of regional information or resources do you provide?
5. Why do you think people contact your region for TA instead of other sources of ADA information?	a. Where else can someone receive TA similar to what is provided by ADANN (JAN, DOJ)? b. What is unique about the TA provided by ADANN?
6. Can you discuss some of the challenges or barriers you have experienced in meeting TA requests?	a. Which types of TA requests are most difficult to address? Why?
7. What kinds of support would help you address	a. What information, resources, tools,

these challenges?	or training do you need?
<p>8. Is it difficult to find useful information on specific topics? If so, which topics?</p>	<p>a. Which topics are not covered in existing information resources?</p> <p>b. Which topics are covered in existing information resources but are not useable (too complex, oversimplified, unclear)?</p> <p>(Note: Gaps in research identified through scoping review include housing, voting, emergency preparedness)</p>
<p>9. What experience or skills are most important to be a TA specialist</p>	<p>a. Personal background</p> <p>b. Professional, technical, content expertise</p>
<p>10. What types of training are most important for TA specialist?</p>	<p>a. What training did you receive to be a TA provider?</p> <p>b. What training would you recommend for a new TA?</p> <p>c. Are the training/qualifications specific to you region, or would this qualify you to work in any region?</p> <p>d. Have you experienced barriers in receiving and/or furthering your training?</p>