



# Technical Assistance Offered Within Child Care and Early Education Licensing in Four States



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# Table of Contents

Overview .....	1
Introduction.....	3
Purpose and Research Questions.....	3
Methods.....	3
Findings .....	4
Study Limitations.....	12
Summary and Considerations for Future Research.....	12
Glossary .....	14
References .....	15
Appendix A. Methods.....	16
Appendix B. Contextual Information for Each Case Study State.....	18



# Overview

## Introduction

Although it is common for licensing agencies to provide **technical assistance**<sup>1</sup> (TA) to **child care and early education** (CCEE) providers, we know little about how **CCEE licensing** agencies approach TA or how providers experience TA. This report from [The Role of Licensing in Early Care and Education \(TRLECE\) project](#) highlights findings from a case study of three states' and one district's (referred as four states' henceforth) approaches to providing TA through their CCEE licensing agencies.

## Purpose

This report describes the perceptions and experiences of 12 **licensing administrators** and **licensing staff** who provide TA, and six center-based child care providers who received TA through licensing in four states. Although findings from the four states do not generalize to the whole country, they do offer preliminary ideas about what TA conducted within CCEE licensing is like and suggest some future directions for research.

## Research questions

The case study was designed to address three research questions:

1. What are some different TA approaches and practices licensing agencies use to support providers?
2. What do licensing staff and CCEE providers perceive as the strengths and challenges in implementing TA within licensing to support providers?
3. How do licensing staff and CCEE providers think TA within licensing could better support providers and improve quality?

## Methods

Between February and June 2023, the team conducted interviews with licensing administrators (n=5), licensing staff providing TA (n=7), and **licensed CCEE** center-based providers (n=6) in four states.

## Key findings and highlights

Key findings and highlights from this case study include:

- Each TA approach described in the case study was structured in one of two ways: 1) integrated within regular licensing **inspection** visits or 2) offered as a stand-alone activity, outside of regular inspection visits. Each approach had unique benefits and challenges.
- TA offered within CCEE licensing in these four states primarily focused on **compliance** with **licensing regulations**, though it also addressed other program goals that were raised during TA sessions (e.g., quality improvement, learning about best practices). TA also offered an opportunity to build rapport and positive relationships between providers and licensing staff.

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<sup>1</sup> The first time we use a term that is defined in the glossary, it will appear in bold purple text. View the [glossary section](#) toward the end of this document for definitions.

- TA helped to address providers' need for support from licensing. However, providers in multiple states suggested a need for more ongoing TA from the **licensing agency**.
- Licensing staff noted the importance of licensing staff working together to meet providers' needs. They suggested that more training and support for licensing staff could help them meet the variety of needs that providers may have.
- Administrators and licensing staff said collaboration and coordination with other organizations or agencies outside of the licensing agency helped to streamline services for providers.
- Although interviewees shared many stories describing successes of their approach, licensing agencies had limited data about how well the overall TA approach was working. It could be helpful for licensing agencies to gather information about the effectiveness of TA offered through licensing to determine the frequency with which TA is offered, the topics discussed while providing TA, if and when providers are able to improve their programs or get back into compliance, and any suggestions or improvements from providers and licensing staff.
- Future research is needed to better understand the role of TA within licensing and how it supports providers. Research could explore, for example, factors associated with providers' use of TA within licensing and supports most helpful to licensing staff who deliver TA.

# Introduction

As of 2017, more than 90 percent of CCEE licensing agencies reported that they directly provided TA or consultation during licensing visits with centers; more than 85 percent reported doing so with family child care providers (National Association for Regulatory Administration, 2020, p. 74). Although we know it is common for licensing agencies to provide TA to CCEE providers, we know little about how licensing agencies approach TA or how providers experience TA.

In 2023, researchers from The Role of Licensing in Early Care and Education (TRLECE) project conducted an exploratory case study to learn more about some licensing agencies' approaches to offering TA, the perceived strengths and challenges of those approaches, and the experiences of providers who received the TA. We interviewed licensing staff in administrative positions, licensing staff who provide TA, and CCEE providers from four states to learn about the TA that licensing agencies offered, and TA providers received.

This study is part of the project [The Role of Licensing in Early Care and Education \(TRLECE\)](#). TRLECE is funded from 2019-2024 by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation in the Administration for Children and Families. The project team includes staff from Child Trends and ICF. The team has conducted a variety of activities to strengthen the field's understanding of child care and early education licensing.

This report describes our research questions, approach to conducting the research, and findings from the study. This report also illustrates how four state licensing agencies provide TA and some provider's experiences with the TA they received. We hope it will inform future research about licensing and its role in supporting providers.

## Purpose and Research Questions

The TRLECE project aims to strengthen the field's understanding of CCEE licensing, including how licensing agencies support providers and quality improvement efforts. Offering TA is one way that CCEE licensing can support providers and quality.

The case study was designed to address three research questions:

1. What are some different TA approaches and practices licensing agencies use to support providers?
2. What do licensing staff and CCEE providers perceive as the strengths and challenges in implementing TA within licensing to support providers?
3. How do licensing staff and CCEE providers think TA within licensing could better support providers and improve quality?

## Methods

The TRLECE team worked closely with the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) and the project's Technical Expert Panel (TEP)<sup>2</sup> to identify research questions and review draft interview questions. In collaboration with OPRE and the TEP, we identified a list of states to invite to participate in the case study. We looked specifically for states where licensing agencies regularly provided TA to CCEE providers. Four states participated: the District of Columbia, Georgia, Louisiana, and Oregon.

We interviewed one to two individuals in each of the following roles in each state:

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<sup>2</sup> The TRLECE Technical Expert Panel (TEP) was comprised of individuals who currently work in state licensing agencies, previously did so, or are knowledgeable of licensing within the broader child care and early education system.

- **Administrators** ( $n=5$ ): either licensing administrators who oversee the entire licensing agency or managers who oversee the TA unit within licensing
- **Licensing staff providing TA** ( $n=7$ ): individuals<sup>3</sup> who work in licensing and are involved in providing TA
- **Center-based providers**<sup>4</sup> ( $n=6$ ): individuals who received TA from licensing staff

We conducted interviews between February and June 2023, using Microsoft Teams. Administrator interviews lasted one hour, interviews with licensing staff delivering TA lasted 45 minutes, and provider interviews lasted 30 minutes. Each interview was recorded and transcribed, with participants' permission.

To summarize the interview transcripts, the study team developed a list of categories, which we refer to as codes, to identify topics in the interviews related to the research questions. The team then assigned codes to each interview transcript. Once coding was complete, the team reviewed the excerpts for each code to identify themes and answer the study's primary research questions. See Appendix A for more information on the study methods.

## Findings

In the following sections, we describe key findings from the case study, including descriptions of each licensing TA approach; goals of the approaches; and strengths, challenges, and opportunities for improvement.

### Contextual information for each state

To provide context for the case study findings, the following sections summarize information about the structure and characteristics of each TA approach.

#### Structure of TA across states

All four states provided TA to both licensed centers and licensed family child care homes<sup>5</sup> (FCCs). Each TA approach was structured in one of two ways: 1) integrated within regular licensing inspection visits or 2) offered as a stand-alone activity, outside of regular inspection visits (see Table 1). We use the terms "integrated" and "stand-alone" to refer to these two approaches throughout the rest of this report.

<sup>3</sup> In some states, these individuals only provided TA. In others, these individuals also conducted regular licensing inspection visits.

<sup>4</sup> Although participation was open to both center-based and family child care providers, no family child care providers volunteered to speak with us.

<sup>5</sup> Louisiana does not license FCCs and therefore does not provide TA to this program type.

**Table 1. Structure of TA, by State**

	DC	GA	LA	OR
<b>Delivery</b>				
Integrated within regular licensing inspection visits	•			•
Offered as a stand-alone activity, outside of regular inspection visits		•	•	
<b>Types of providers prioritized for TA</b>				
All providers	•			•
Newly licensed providers	•	•	•	
Providers interested in becoming licensed	•		•	
Providers with violations who meet a certain status (e.g., deficient or support status) <sup>6</sup>	•	•	•	•

In the integrated TA approach (DC and OR), **routine compliance inspections** and TA generally occurred at the same time and were completed by the same individual. Because of this structure, all providers received TA. However, both the District of Columbia and Oregon administered additional TA to providers if they requested assistance; the District of Columbia also provided supplemental assistance to newly licensed providers and those interested in becoming licensed.

In the stand-alone TA approach (GA and LA), a distinct team of licensing staff delivered TA to providers separately from regular inspection visits. These states prioritized TA services for newly licensed providers and providers with violations who met a certain status (e.g., deficient or support status). In Louisiana, TA was mandatory when assigned; Georgia offered TA on a voluntary basis.

## Characteristics of licensing staff who provide TA

Licensing staff delivering TA in states with integrated approaches reported caseloads from 50 to 70 providers, while those in states with stand-alone TA approaches tended to serve about 15 to 20 providers at a time. These staff also helped with content development (e.g., regulation guidebooks) and conducted provider trainings (e.g., first aid, licensing orientation; see Table 2).

**Table 2. Characteristics of Licensing Staff Who Provide TA, by State**

	DC	GA	LA	OR
<b>Responsibilities of licensing staff who provide TA</b>				
Conduct licensing inspection visits	•			•
Provide TA	•	•	•	•
Support content development (e.g., regulation guidebooks)	•			•
Facilitate training for providers	•	•	•	
Assist the agency with other tasks not related to TA, as needed		•		
<b>Minimum qualifications, training, and experience of licensing staff who provide TA</b>				
Bachelor's degree	•	•	•	
Training on providing TA and coaching		•		
Previous experience with inspections, licensing, or early childhood	•	•	•	•

Licensing staff providing TA in most states were required to have a bachelor's degree and previous experience with inspections, licensing, early childhood development, or child care and early education. Georgia was the only state that required formal training on how to provide TA and coaching. However, most

<sup>6</sup> A deficient or support status is a determination by the licensing agency in one's state that the child care provider has violated one or more specific regulations or is non-compliant with the state's rules and regulations. Deficiencies can range in scope and severity with no actual harm to children to widespread violations that may have caused harm to children.



states provided some resources to support licensing staff who deliver TA, either through onboarding materials, communities of practice, reflective supervision, general trainings, or other supports. For example, one licensing staff member described how they met with their team in a community of practice once per week to talk about how they handled various cases. This person also noted that they received training on communications, ethics, and sensitivity.

## Origin of TA and a description of licensing TA sessions

Table 3 provides an overview of the origin of each state's licensing TA approach and additional details about how the TA was delivered to providers. See Appendix B for more information.

**Table 3. State Licensing TA Approach Origin and Session Descriptions**

Origin		TA session descriptions
<b>DC</b>	DC integrated TA with licensing inspection visits after providers reported that it was challenging to become licensed and maintain compliance with licensing regulations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TA focused on reviewing violations and regulations, helping with paperwork, and providing referrals.</li> <li>• Licensing TA staff also answered questions, made providers aware of trainings, and provided suggestions for program improvement.</li> <li>• Licensing TA staff supported providers interested in licensure by helping them navigate approvals, inspections, and requirements from licensing and other agencies (e.g., fire departments).</li> </ul>
<b>GA</b>	Georgia introduced their stand-alone TA approach in response to concerns about health and safety issues in programs and a desire from programs for two distinct roles (regulator and TA support).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Licensing staff who provide TA reached out directly to providers to offer TA.</li> <li>• They worked with providers until providers had two consecutive "good standing" regular inspection visits, where they showed understanding of compliance with the rules.</li> <li>• Licensing TA staff who provide TA worked with newly licensed programs until all their goals and action steps were met.</li> </ul>
<b>LA</b>	Louisiana began offering stand-alone TA as a service outside of regular licensing inspection visits in response to staff concerns that they didn't have capacity to support providers' needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Louisiana's TA approach focused on training and support during the first year of licensure and supplemental support to existing providers with violations.</li> <li>• During TA sessions, licensing TA staff completed a walk-through of the program, discussed how to resolve citations, pointed out situations that may result in future violations, answered questions, and explained licensing regulations.</li> <li>• Follow-up inspections were conducted with providers who had citations to confirm that violations were fixed following the TA visit.</li> </ul>
<b>OR</b>	Oregon has a long history of integrating TA in inspection visits. Providers and provider associations/unions were interested in a more interactive dialogue between licensing TA staff and providers. Licensing staff also observed challenges in programs and acknowledged the need for more provider support. Since then, they focused their TA approach on strengthening relationships with providers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During visits, staff distributed materials that helped explain some licensing regulations and best practices.</li> <li>• During TA sessions, licensing TA staff answered questions and explained licensing regulations. They also provided referrals during TA visits to connect providers with other local supports (e.g., child care resource and referral).</li> </ul>

## Goals of licensing TA

Administrators and licensing staff delivering TA consistently reported that TA meant supplying individualized support to help providers understand and comply with regulations. They described several specific goals that guided their work—these goals are described in this section. We also describe how relationship building was viewed as a fundamental component of successful TA.

### Supporting providers' understanding of licensing and other program goals

All licensing staff (administrators and staff providing TA) talked about **supporting providers' understanding of licensing regulations** as a core goal of their TA. They said that TA was not simply reviewing expectations, but a strategy to ensure providers understood *why* certain licensing regulations existed and *how* they might be applied to their specific context. In their examples, staff explained that collaboration with providers during TA sessions helped them identify barriers to compliance and develop solutions. Some licensing staff also noted the importance of helping newly licensed providers understand licensing expectations before penalizing them for not achieving them.

*"If there are deficiencies cited on that first compliance inspection, no matter if it's one or two, we make a referral to the technical assistance consultant and the technical assistance consultant would reach out to that provider and schedule a date and time that is convenient for both of them. Sooner, rather sooner than later, where the TA consultant would go out to that center during operation hours and kind of walk through the center. Saying 'Hey, we know that you were cited on this day for your first compliance inspection. We want to come out just to make sure that you don't have any questions or concerns about anything related to the licensing regulations and what is required.' So the specialists goes out, walks through the center kind of point things out to the provider. We don't cite deficiencies at that time, but at that point in time it is truly just a training session, just to kind of make sure that the provider understands again what is the expectations and the requirement of the rules."*

**-Administrator**

Staff also explained that their TA often involved **identifying, explaining, and correcting violations**. In approaches where TA and licensing inspections occurred separately, staff either reviewed violations cited during past inspections or performed a walk-through of the facility to help identify other areas of noncompliance. In doing so, they aimed to ensure providers had a thorough understanding of why they were previously cited or alert them to reasons they could be cited in the future. In approaches where TA and licensing inspections occurred simultaneously, licensing staff who provide TA explained that they would help to identify problems and then help providers understand how to address them. For simple and relatively minor violations (e.g., needing to replace electrical outlet covers), they could choose to forgo a citation and instead advise providers about how to immediately correct the problem. In cases like this, the conversation about the minor violation would be recorded as TA rather than a violation. Providers appreciated how this approach allowed them time to correct minor issues and better understand potential violations before being formally cited.

Some licensing staff (administrators and staff providing TA) commented on how they aimed to **help providers maintain compliance** by identifying and responding proactively to issues. In practice, this meant sharing resources with providers about specific regulations (particularly providers with patterns of violations), or offering guidance around new changes to licensing regulations. One licensing staff member who provided TA shared an example of this, explaining that if many providers were having compliance issues with a similar topic (e.g., safe sleep practices), they would develop an informational guide for all providers to help them meet requirements.

When describing their goals, some administrators and licensing staff providing TA reflected that their TA went beyond licensing regulations and often involved **helping providers brainstorm solutions to issues not related to licensing, set and track goals, improve quality, learn about other resources available to them, or**

**think about how to apply best practices in their program.** Although these goals were not the primary purpose of the TA, they explained that licensing staff or providers sometimes brought up these topics during TA sessions. Staff described things like suggesting environmental changes, offering tips for expanding enrollment, and explaining the process for opening additional child care programs. Although encouraging providers to pursue higher education was not a formal part of the TA, several licensing staff who provide TA mentioned that seeing providers obtain credentials and degrees was a source of pride for them and an indicator of the success of their TA. Some providers echoed this theme, describing how TA helped them achieve certifications or complete their state mandated professional development hours requirements.

*"And then she also gave me ... a print-out on how they can come into our center and do training various times of day. ... They would come in, they would do a training, but our employees would also get certifications for the training that they did, which I felt was excellent."*

**-Provider**

## Building relationships

All interviewees (administrators, licensing staff, and providers) commented on how trusting relationships between licensing staff and providers established the basis for successful TA. Licensing staff who deliver TA explained how navigating this relationship was complex, particularly if providers had negative experiences with licensing in the past, so they worked hard to **build rapport** with providers. In some cases, this meant making time to get to know one another or offering space to talk about general successes and challenges. According to licensing staff providing TA, allocating this time to build rapport helped everyone more meaningfully engage in TA.

*"I had this one provider... They felt very marginalized by our agency in the past by different licensors... So, I read the room very quickly and just tried to learn from them, like asked them about their program, experience, and background. I was curious and I wanted to learn about them. And then I shared that I came from the field in different ways, and I could see the physical change in them. They relaxed a little bit and became more receptive... They then started coming to me. So, I could tell that we had built that trust and they were more receptive to TA."*

**-Licensing staff who provides TA**

*"They're [child care providers] very thankful and I think it feels more like we're walking beside them and trying to support versus...you know, there's always been that feeling that they're just coming with a hammer, you know, and that's not the way we want the feeling to be or the relationship to be."*

**-Administrator**

*"Relationships are number one. The key is building rapport and relationships as part of TA. That is what the first visit is all about. Your role kind of shifts. You're almost like a therapist listening to them. But you're an expert, you're a coach or a trainer. You're all of those roles."*

**-Licensing staff who provides TA**

Across both stand-alone and integrated TA approaches, licensing staff providing TA highlighted the importance of **building a sense of safety and trust** so that providers would be willing to ask questions and talk about their challenges implementing licensing regulations. In the stand-alone TA approaches, licensing staff described how they would inform providers about their role prior to and at the start of any site visits. In doing so, they hoped to alleviate concerns that they would cite violations during visits.<sup>7</sup> Providers in these states shared appreciation for this approach, noting that they felt more confident asking questions when they knew their conversations would remain confidential and not result in violations.

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<sup>7</sup> Licensing staff in one state that provided TA using a stand-alone approach explained that they would only write a citation if there was a violation that risked the immediate health and safety of children.

*"I'm not intimidated when she comes. The fact that she's so supportive and she's always calm and even-keeled and you know. I think that the program, what it does for me is to support me and the fact that what I'm saying to her is kept between me and her. That confidentiality and the fact that I can say anything to her. I think that those are very [important]."*

**-Provider**

*"Our technical assistance ... has been absolutely amazing, instrumental and invaluable. I genuinely feel like I can go to her and ask her any questions that I may have about licensing and there's, like, no judgment. ... she's just there to help and make sure that we get things done right."*

**-Provider**

A few licensing staff who provided TA also noted the importance of **consistency and long-standing relationships with providers**. They explained that when long-standing relationships were forged between licensing staff and providers, they were better able to communicate and address their needs. Providers also described how they felt more comfortable communicating with licensing staff and asking for assistance when they worked with the same staff over a long period of time.

*"I think it's helpful as well as beneficial to have the same person. Simply because you'll start to realize, OK, you're here to help and assist me. ... So, you feel a little comfortable with having the same person and getting the feel of who this person is. You know what their expectations are of you. They know your expectations of them and it makes it a little easier to be open."*

**-Provider**

## Strengths, challenges, and opportunities for improvement

Throughout our conversations with administrators, licensing staff, and providers, we heard about strengths and challenges of each TA approach. Interviewees also described opportunities for improvement and recommendations for other states interested in implementing a similar approach. These findings are described within themes that emerged from the interviews in the following sections.

### Addressing the need for TA within licensing

All administrators, licensing staff providing TA, and providers acknowledged the important role of TA within licensing. As described in the *Goals of Licensing TA* section, interviewees reflected positively on their experiences providing and receiving licensing TA. They shared how the **TA improved health and safety in programs, helped providers achieve other program goals, and established and strengthened relationships** between the licensing agency and providers. One provider explained that the TA from the licensing agency was different from TA provided by other agencies (e.g., quality rating and improvement system [QRIS]) because of licensing staff's unique expertise in licensing rules and regulations. Licensing staff providing TA added that a benefit of including TA within licensing was that providers could focus more on program improvement while avoiding penalties like fines or other punitive measures.

*"I have to speak very highly of the overall program. I really love frankly everything about it. I'm actually worried about what's gonna happen when I lose her. It has provided such a sense of comfort knowing I can go to someone in a non-judgmental fashion. I wish that I could have gotten this help before we were in the position we are in..."*

**-Provider**

While all providers voiced appreciation for the support they received from licensing, providers in multiple states suggested a need for **more ongoing TA from licensing** in response to changing program needs over time. Some reflected on the importance of having licensing staff come into their program focused on supporting rather than penalizing their program, especially when they are orienting new staff in their programs.

*"When you're dealing with licensing, most people have the mindset, 'they come in and see what they can write me up for.' But with our centers, it's been a totally different experience with licensing. ... it's like, 'This is how you're supposed to be doing this, do you need any help getting it straightened out?'"*

**-Provider**

Some **administrators and licensing staff acknowledged that they did not have enough staff** to meet the TA needs of providers. Likewise, interviewees in all states noted that **persistent staffing shortages and high turnover rates among providers** presented a variety of TA challenges. For some providers, high turnover rates meant that they regularly had new staff who needed TA on licensing rules and regulations. Licensing staff providing TA in two states explained that staffing shortages made it hard for providers to meaningfully engage in TA while balancing other responsibilities. One licensing administrator pointed out that this challenge resonated with many home-based providers as well, who operate with small staff and may not be able to step away from working to engage in TA.

In states where TA was offered on a voluntary basis, some administrators and licensing staff providing TA shared concerns that **providers may not request TA** because they were either 1) distrustful of licensing and therefore wary of requesting support or 2) did not know about the TA offered by licensing. Some suggested that **more advertising and outreach** could promote provider awareness of TA through licensing and program buy-in. Some suggested making the TA mandatory rather than voluntary to ensure all providers with violations or other needs would receive support.

*"So, if I spend a lot of time with this program, giving them technical assistance, supporting them, giving them ideas, helping them make their program bigger, better, brighter... then this [other] provider never asked for anything. How equitable is that? And so we look at that a lot. How do we ensure we're meeting everyone's needs? And just because someone doesn't ask for support, are we aware when support is needed or how do we listen? People ask in different ways. And so how in tune are we to our providers so we know they're really seeking support?"*

**-Administrator**

## Training and support for licensing staff who provide TA

Multiple administrators and licensing staff reflected on the value of the **licensing agency working as a team to support providers**. Regardless of the TA approach taken, licensing staff who provide TA shared that they relied on their colleagues' expertise to help brainstorm solutions and support providers. In approaches where licensing staff conduct TA as a stand-alone activity, they talked about their efforts to collaborate with other licensing staff who conduct regular inspections.

*"We rely on each other a lot, and so it's got to be a lot of communication with your team so that people know what, what gifts they can add."*

**-Administrator**

*"Sometimes it's just trial and error, it's just talking with your colleagues."*

**-Licensing staff who provides TA**

When talking about preparation for their role, several licensing staff providing TA noted that they **did not have formal training or support** when they first began their role. They acknowledged that providers' needs were diverse, and that additional training and support could help them meet those needs.



Administrators and licensing staff offered several suggestions to **integrate more training or support for incoming and current staff responsible for providing TA**, including:

- Developing a systematic onboarding process for new licensing staff providing TA,
- Promoting awareness of existing trainings within and outside of the licensing agency,
- Helping licensing staff access additional credentials and become involved in national organizations or associations (e.g., National Association of Regulatory Administration [NARA]), and
- Providing opportunities to attend conferences.

## Collaborating with other agencies

Some administrators and licensing staff providing TA mentioned the **importance of having strong connections with other organizations** that either provide assistance to CCEE providers (e.g., Child Care Resource and Referral agencies) or help CCEE providers satisfy licensing requirements (e.g., local fire departments). One administrator shared that completing joint training with other agencies and holding interagency meetings helped them streamline support for providers.

*“The interagency partnerships have greatly improved the time that [it] takes people to get licensed.”*

**-Administrator**

Several administrators and licensing staff providing TA explained that **providers can be overwhelmed by the number of different agencies that come into their program**, and it can be unclear who to go to with questions. They suggested that **better coordination across organizations** may, 1) streamline site visits to programs and 2) ensure that providers can obtain appropriate advice for all their questions.

## Understanding progress of TA

When asked about how they knew TA was accomplishing its purpose, licensing staff providing TA shared anecdotes about providers coming back into compliance, maintaining compliance, or showing evidence of progress during site visits. Most administrators explained that **using data to measure progress was challenging** because they either lacked data about what was covered during TA visits or did not have capacity to analyze the data.

One state had the opportunity to work with a research firm to track progress by sending surveys to CCEE providers following TA visits and analyzing the results. The administrator explained that this helped them identify areas for improvement in their TA approach. Administrators and licensing staff from other states expressed **interest in collecting data** on the number of times licensing provides TA and the content covered during a session, and then tracking whether those programs had fewer licensing violations over time. Although they shared stories about the success of their TA approach, many voiced interest in knowing more about the progress of their work; one administrator noted that this data may help them work proactively to identify and address patterns of violations before they begin.

*“[A provider] came to childcare, wanted to open a center, had never worked in childcare, didn’t know really anything. We spent a lot of time on the phone and talking through things. ... we established a rapport and now she’s opening a second center. Her first center is very successful. ... to see her growth has been very rewarding. So it was well worth my time invested with her. Even though it took a lot of hand holding and time.”*

**-Licensing staff who provides TA**

## Study Limitations

There are important limitations to consider when interpreting the findings of this study. The findings represent the views of a small number of people in a few states and are not representative of all the potential perspectives within each state or all TA approaches that exist across the country. We also had limited time with each respondent, so we prioritized breadth over depth; the findings presented may not be exhaustive.

Finally, the team conceptualized TA as a distinct licensing activity and developed unique interview questions for each respondent type. However, we interviewed two states with integrated TA approaches. For those states, the TA approach was part of the licensing inspection process, so it was sometimes challenging for participants (particularly providers) to reflect on and describe the TA activities separately from regular licensing inspections. Some providers were not aware that they received TA. While this suggests that TA was seamlessly integrated into licensing inspection visits, it made it more challenging for us to learn about TA as an activity distinct from inspections.

## Summary and Considerations for Future Research

This report describes the perceptions and experiences of a few licensing administrators, licensing staff who provide TA, and a few center-based child care providers who received TA through licensing. Although findings from the four states do not generalize to the whole country, they do offer preliminary ideas about what TA conducted within CCEE licensing is like and suggest some future directions for research.

In this section of the report, we offer some key takeaways and considerations, including possible ideas for future research.

**There are at least two approaches to offering TA, with benefits and challenges related to each.** Integrating TA within licensing inspection visits allows licensing staff to seamlessly offer TA throughout their regular interactions with providers, though some providers could be reluctant to ask questions of the person who inspects their program. Having a stand-alone TA unit within licensing allows some licensing staff to focus solely on TA, and some providers may feel more comfortable asking questions and sharing concerns knowing that it likely will not lead to a licensing violation. Yet, some providers may not be comfortable reaching out to licensing for help, and the stand-alone approach may not reach as many providers. Regardless of the type of approach, many licensing staff and providers highlighted the importance of building relationships through trust and safety which allowed providers to ask more questions, seek assistance for their program, and better communicate among staff. Future research could further explore the various approaches licensing agencies use in offering TA and examine the factors associated with success within and across the approaches.

**TA offered within CCEE licensing in these four states primarily focuses on compliance with licensing regulations, though it also addresses other goals.** Case study participants described the TA as helping providers understand and comply with licensing regulations. While this may be the primary focus of the TA, participants also mentioned that the TA could address other goals of interest among providers, like improving quality outside of licensing regulations. Future research could identify the range of goals for TA offered within licensing, the extent to which providers helped develop the goals, and factors associated with successfully reaching licensing TA goals.

**Positive relationships between licensing staff and providers are important.** Both licensing staff and providers mentioned the importance of positive relationships in the provision of TA within licensing. This can include building a sense of safety and trust so that providers feel comfortable raising questions. Future research could examine provider perceptions about their relationship with licensing staff, factors associated

with positive relationships, and the association between positive relationships and compliance with licensing regulations or TA outcomes.

**It could be helpful for licensing agencies to gather information about the effectiveness of TA offered through licensing.** This might mean articulating goals or intended outcomes for TA and gathering data to see if those outcomes are met. The people we spoke to anecdotally described some of the ways they knew whether TA was successful and noted their interest in gathering more data. Licensing staff who provide TA mentioned compliance with licensing as a measure of success and shared stories about how TA resulted in improved compliance. Future research could examine the extent to which TA meets its intended outcomes and the factors associated with successful TA.

In addition to the specific research ideas noted above, **future research is needed to better understand the role of TA within licensing and how it supports providers.** Research could explore questions such as:

- What TA do CCEE providers most want to receive from licensing? What content would they like? How would they prefer it to be delivered?
- What factors are associated with CCEE providers' awareness and use of TA offered within licensing?
- What approaches to TA are used by licensing agencies across states and territories? What factors influence the approach to TA used by licensing agencies? For example, do the approaches vary by the goal of TA or the type of providers eligible for TA?
- What are the elements of TA offered by licensing staff (e.g., goal setting, observation, problem-solving)? Are particular TA elements more likely to support success than others?
- What professional development and supports are most helpful to licensing staff who deliver TA to CCEE providers?
- How do licensing agency staff coordinate with other agencies to meet TA goals?

The team hopes that this initial report about how four states' licensing agencies offer TA to CCEE providers will inform the practice of TA within licensing as well as research about TA within licensing.

# Glossary

**Child care and early education:** Caregiving and educational services for children from birth to age 13. CCEE includes center- and home-based settings for infants, toddlers, preschool- and school-aged children. CCEE refers to services for a larger age group than early care and education (ECE), which consists of services provided only for young children (birth to age 5 who are not yet in kindergarten). ECE programs are included within the definition of CCEE.

**Child care and early education licensing:** Establishes regulations that must be met to legally operate a child care program. Child care licensing also monitors and enforces those regulations.

**Child care and early education licensing staff:** Any staff who work in CCEE licensing (e.g., front-line staff, managers, administrative or clerical staff).

**Citation:** The documentation of a CCEE provider's violation of licensing regulations.

**Compliance:** Adherence to licensing regulations.

**Inspection:** A visit to assess if a CCEE provider is meeting licensing regulations.

**Licensed child care and early education:** CCEE programs operated in homes or facilities that fall within the regulatory system of a state or community and comply with those regulations. Many states have different licensing and regulatory requirements (adapted from Child Care & Early Education Research Connections, n.d.).

**Licensing administrator:** The person who oversees the operation of the CCEE licensing agency.

**Licensing agency:** The agency responsible for regulating and licensing CCEE facilities. The term "licensing unit" may also be used.

**Licensing regulations:** "Requirements that providers must meet to legally operate child care services in a state or locality, including registration requirements established under state, local, or Tribal law" (Child Care & Early Education Research Connections, n.d. -a). (Child Care & Early Education Research Connections uses this definition for "licensing or regulatory requirements.")

**Routine compliance inspection:** An inspection of a CCEE provider for compliance with the regulations that occurs periodically throughout the year and is not part of the initial licensure or renewal (adapted from National Association for Regulatory Administration & National Child Care Information Center, 2006). The term "routine inspection" may also be used.

**Technical assistance:** "The provision of targeted and customized supports by a professional(s) with subject matter and adult learning knowledge and skills to develop or strengthen processes, knowledge application, or implementation of services by recipients" (National Association for the Education of Young Children & National Association for Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, 2011, p. 18).

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# Appendix A. Methods

Below we provide detailed information about the TRLECE team's research methods for this case study.

## Interview protocol development

The TRLECE team worked closely with OPRE and the project's Technical Expert Panel<sup>8</sup> (TEP) to identify research questions and review draft interview questions. After developing draft interview protocols, a subset of the project's TEP members reviewed and provided feedback on their clarity and utility. We revised the draft protocols based on TEP recommendations. Protocol topics included: understanding the TA approach; how the approach started; the goals of the approach; what has worked well and what could be improved; data or information gathering about the approach; what TA looks like; how it has made a difference for providers; successes and challenges to the approach; and provider's experiences and perspectives on receiving TA.

## Recruitment strategy

In collaboration with OPRE and the TEP, the TRLECE team invited Georgia, Louisiana, Oregon, and Washington, D.C to participate in this case study. We chose these states because they are geographically diverse and represent a mix of approaches to licensing TA (e.g., TA offered simultaneously with inspection visits and stand-alone TA visits). The TEP provided input on state selection.

For the study, we aimed to talk to one child care licensing administrator or manager who oversees TA (referred to as administrators throughout this report), two licensing staff that provide TA, and two CCEE providers who had recently received TA. To recruit participants, we used a snowball sampling recruitment method in which interviewees recommended individuals for subsequent interviews. Administrators who expressed interest in participating were invited to complete an initial interview; in some cases multiple administrators joined the interview. At the conclusion of our interviews with administrators, we requested that they recommend licensing staff who provide TA and providers who recently received TA for an interview. If they were unable to recommend providers, we asked licensing staff who deliver TA to provide suggestions. In these cases, licensing staff either shared a list of potential CCEE providers or distributed an online survey link where providers could express interest in participating. If multiple providers were eligible, the research team randomly selected two CCEE providers from each state to invite for an interview. We attempted to reach each individual up to five times via email and phone during the recruitment process.

## Interview procedures

We conducted interviews between February and June 2023, using Microsoft Teams. Administrator interviews lasted one hour, other licensing staff interviews lasted 45 minutes, and provider interviews lasted 30 minutes. Each interview was recorded and transcribed with the participants' permission.

## Interviewee characteristics

In total, we spoke with five licensing staff in administrative positions, seven licensing staff who provided TA, and six providers. We spoke to at least one administrator, TA staff, and provider in each of three states. We tailored the questions for each respondent type, meaning we had three different protocols: one for administrative positions, one for licensing staff who provided TA, and one for providers. All administrators had multiple years of experience working in the CCEE sector prior to serving in their current roles (e.g.,

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<sup>8</sup> The TRLECE Technical Expert Panel (TEP) was comprised of individuals who currently work in state licensing agencies, previously did so, or are knowledgeable of licensing within the broader child care and early education system.

teaching, another role within licensing or subsidy). All staff who provided TA had past experience inspecting providers for compliance.

The CCEE providers we spoke with were all center directors and/or owners.<sup>9</sup> Their program size ranged from around 50 to 150 children and length of licensure varied from 3 to 20+ years. Nearly all of them also participated in their state QRIS and subsidy program.

## Coding and analysis

To summarize the interview transcripts, the Child Trends team created a coding scheme (i.e., a list of topics related to the research questions that were mentioned during interviews) using a two-step process. First, we developed an initial coding scheme based on interview topics and the research questions listed above. Then we conducted a preliminary review of transcripts from interviews with people in different roles and states to inform revisions to the coding scheme and the addition of sub/child codes. The study's principal investigator (PI) reviewed the coding scheme and proposed additional revisions.

The team used Dedoose, a secure qualitative data analysis software, to code transcripts. Each interview protocol was double-coded, meaning two researchers coded the same interview. The coders discussed their coding and came to consensus on any discrepancies. If needed, they discussed the discrepancy with the full coding group, including the study's PI. The full group held weekly coding meetings to discuss issues and questions as they arose. If new codes emerged during consensus, the team discussed clarifications and adjusted the codebook as needed. When changes were made to the codebook, coders would review the protocol and re-code previously coded transcriptions to reflect any updates. An additional consensus meeting would then occur to address those updates.

Once coding was complete, the team used the analysis feature in Dedoose and downloaded data tables from Dedoose with the code applications to conduct a thematic analysis. The team also conducted subgroup analyses by participant type and TA approach to answer the study's primary research questions.

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<sup>9</sup> Although participation was open to both center-based and family child care providers, no family child care providers volunteered to speak with us.

## Appendix B. Contextual Information for Each Case Study State

This appendix describes the origin of each state's licensing TA approach and additional details about how the TA was delivered to providers.

### District of Columbia

Administrators in the District of Columbia reported that they integrated TA with regular licensing inspection visits after providers reported that it was challenging to become licensed and to maintain compliance with licensing regulations. The goals of TA through licensing were to answer providers' questions, make providers aware of relevant training, and to provide suggestions for program improvement. Licensing staff who provide TA said TA often involved individualized support for providers including reviewing active violations or rules and regulations, helping with paperwork, and providing referrals to other resources or agencies. They also reported supporting providers interested in becoming licensed or opening a new program by helping them navigate various approvals, inspections, and requirements from licensing and other agencies (e.g., fire departments).

### Georgia

Georgia introduced their TA approach in the early 2010s in response to concerns about health and safety issues in programs. They also heard a desire for separate roles between the licensing staff and the TA support; in which the licensing staff only focus on regulatory services conducting licensing inspections and the staff who provide TA focus on conducting TA visits, professional development, coaching, and resource sharing with providers they serve. The approach was designed to focus on newly licensed providers and providers with licensing violations; licensing staff who provide TA reach out directly to these groups of providers to offer TA. Georgia administrators designed their TA approach as a stand-alone support (i.e., occurring separately from regular inspection visits), operating a special unit that works with providers. These staff reported that they worked with providers until they had two consecutive "good standing" regular inspection visits with licensing. According to Georgia's Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), technical assistance is defined as:

"A voluntary service and mutual partnership that offers a variety of resources and referrals, as well as coaching/modeling/mentoring to staff, customized trainings, action plans for developing goals, and steps to target identified areas needing assistance or improvement. Using a schedule that best meets the needs of the program, a TA Consultant will assist with the development and implementation of a customized plan built on the strengths and goals of the program. Action steps are individualized and developed collaboratively to improve quality and maintain compliance with all rules and regulations and progress is documented to show the steps taken by the child care program in meeting their goals." <sup>10</sup>

### Louisiana

Louisiana began offering TA as a service outside of regular licensing inspection visits in response to staff concerns that they did not have capacity to support providers' needs. Louisiana's TA approach focused on: 1) training and support during the first year of licensure and 2) supplemental support to existing providers with violations (i.e., if they have a one-time serious incident, 15 or more violations during one visit, or the

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<sup>10</sup> Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. (n.d.). *What is technical assistance within child care services?* <https://www.dec.state.ga.us/Child-Care/TechnicalAssistance.aspx>

same violation cited two times in a row at consecutive inspections or three times within the past two years). Licensing staff conducting inspections would refer providers to the licensing staff who deliver TA. Providers could also reach out to the licensing staff who deliver TA with questions at any point. Licensing staff who offer TA in Louisiana worked with all new providers to provide training and answer questions about licensing rules and regulations. If one of these providers was cited for a violation during one of their initial inspection visits, licensing staff who deliver TA scheduled a consultation to help them understand the nature of the violation and how it could be resolved. During TA sessions, licensing staff who provide TA completed a walk-through of the program, talked about how to resolve active citations, pointed out situations that may result in future violations, answered questions, and explained licensing regulations. A follow-up inspection was conducted with providers who had citations to confirm that violations were fixed following the TA visit. Licensing staff delivering TA worked with providers until they no longer had violations during follow-up inspections.

## Oregon

Oregon has a long history of offering TA during regular licensing inspection visits. The licensing administrator explained that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, monitoring and licensing inspections became more stringent due to health and safety concerns. Recently, providers and provider associations/unions voiced their interest in creating space for more interactive dialogue between licensing staff delivering TA and providers. Licensing staff also observed challenges in CCEE programs (e.g., staffing shortages) and acknowledged the need for more support for providers. Since then, they focused their TA approach on strengthening their relationships with providers. The goals of the TA were guided by providers' needs and questions. Overall, they tried to build relationships with providers to learn their style, communicate more effectively, and make sure they understood the rules and expectations for their unique programs. During visits, staff distributed materials that help explain some licensing regulations and best practices in areas such as safe sleep practices. They also provided referrals during TA visits to connect providers with other local supports (e.g., child care resource and referral).