

## **Overview of NHTSA Driver Education Program Technical Assessment Process**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The Driver Education Program Technical Assessment, like the other technical assessments, is a tool offered by NHTSA to States allowing those responsible for oversight to review the driver education program. This is a cooperative effort among NHTSA, the State Highway Safety Office (SHSO) and other agencies or offices, such as the Department of Motor Vehicles, the Department of Public Safety, the Department of Transportation, and the Department of Education, which contributes to the State's driver education efforts in some States. The Drivers Education Program Technical Assessment follows the format and procedures utilized by other highway safety and emergency medical services (EMS) program assessments.

### **II. OBJECTIVES**

The technical assessment program offers States a tool to use over time to review their driver education program, note the program's strengths and accomplishments, and note where improvements can be made. The assessment can be used as a management tool for planning purposes and for making decisions about how to best use available resources. The driver education program technical assessment process provides an organized approach for meeting these objectives.

### **III. BACKGROUND**

NHTSA has developed a technical assessment tool that permits States to utilize highway safety funds, or other funds, to support the evaluation of existing and proposed driver education programs and activities over a period of time. The Drivers Education Program Technical Assessment is based on the recommendations in *Novice Teen Driver Education and Training Administrative Standards*. These administrative standards complete a set of three guidance documents that will assist States in planning and implementing effective driver education systems. Together with the model curriculum and model curriculum standards developed by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the American Driver and Traffic Safety Education, as well as curriculum standards developed by the Driving School Association of the Americas, these new administrative standards provide a comprehensive framework for State driver education systems. The framework follows a professional education approach, allowing flexibility for local conditions and efficiency for periodic technical updates, while promoting consistency and quality assurance across programs and among States. NHTSA supported the development of this document, but these standards are not NHTSA's creation, but rather the creation of the national driver education community. The *Novice Teen Driver Education and Training Administrative Standards* are used as the basis against which each State program is assessed. The Driver Education Program Technical Assessment examines the following components of a comprehensive driver education program: overall program administration, education/training, instructor qualifications, parent involvement and coordination with driver licensing. The standards for the Driver Education Program Technical Assessment (the *Novice Teen Driver Education and Training Administrative Standards*) are included in Appendix 1.

For the assessment, NHTSA serves as a facilitator by assembling a team of individuals who have demonstrated expertise in driver education program development and implementation. Selection of assessment team members is also based on needs and experiences identified by the State in the pre-assessment site visit.

As indicated above, the Driver Education Program Technical Assessment is a cooperative effort between NHTSA and various State offices. NHTSA's Enforcement and Justice Services Division (responsible for driver education programs) coordinates and facilitates the assessment; NHTSA's Regional Office provides input and administrative support; the State Highway Safety Office (SHSO) provides funding (if requested) utilizing State and Community Highway Safety Grant monies (Section 402); and the State Office responsible for Driver Education, if other than the SHSO, is an additional source of potential funding and provides the background information and comprehensive briefings necessary for the technical assessment team to develop their report.

As of December 2010, two (2) States have conducted driver education program technical assessments. Maryland developed the assessment tools and processes with assistance from NHTSA and independently conducted an assessment. Following the completion of the Oregon assessment, a NHTSA pilot, NHTSA assumed the role of coordinator and facilitator for the Driver Education Program Technical Assessment.

## **VI. CRITERIA FOR REQUESTING AN ASSESSMENT**

To request a Driver Education Program Technical Assessment, the State office responsible for Driver Education and/or the State Highway Safety Office should contact the appropriate NHTSA Regional Office in writing. NHTSA's Regional Office will then notify NHTSA's Enforcement and Justice Services Division in Washington, DC, who will then follow-up with the Regional Office and the State and facilitate a pre-assessment site visit. During the site visit, ideally at the proposed assessment site, NHTSA will meet with the State to present the assessment process and discuss potential dates, issues that need to be addressed in the assessment, potential team members, roles and responsibilities of NHTSA and the State. A sample pre-site visit agenda can be found in Appendix 2.

Based on the information provided, the Enforcement and Justice Services Division and the State agree on dates for the assessment and, with Regional Office input, assembles an appropriate technical assessment team. The technical assessment team consists of five (5) individuals who have demonstrated expertise in various aspects of program development and implementation associated with driver education, plus an administrative consultant who is responsible for the actual production of the final report. For the driver education program technical assessments, team members are selected with expertise in areas such as program administration, driver education/training, instructor qualifications, parent involvement and coordination with driver licensing.

The requesting State is responsible for providing travel cost, per diem, administrative support and honoraria (\$350.00 per day, Sunday through Thursday/Friday) for the technical assessment team members (including the administrative consultant). The requesting State is also responsible for selection of a suitable hotel for conducting the assessment; arranging for and scheduling

participants to make presentations or be interviewed; providing all equipment and supplies identified in this document; and arranging travel and hotel accommodations for team members. The average cost of a driver education program technical assessment ranges between \$25,000 and \$35,000. However, the cost has been as low as \$15,000 when a State elected to host the technical assessment at a government facility, which reduced expense costs associated with securing Conference and Work room. If the State elects to conduct a technical assessment at a government facility for potential cost savings to conduct the technical assessment, the hotel for the technical assessment team must be within walking distance of the host facility or a vehicle must be made available to the assessment team for transportation between the hotel and host facility.

Whenever possible, the State should arrange to pre-pay the team members' travel, include team lodging expenses on a master hotel bill. Also, the State should arrange to provide payment for services rendered by the technical assessment team members at the conclusion of the assessment week (Thursday/Friday) before they depart the assessment site. If this is not possible, payment should be made to team members no later than thirty (30) days after the week in which the assessment was conducted.

## **V. PROCESS**

Three and one-half to four and one-half days are required for a driver education program technical assessment. The size and complexities of the State will determine the length of the assessment. Generally there are two to three days of presentations by subject matter experts in the State, including a two-hour briefing by the State to present data and overall program activities and details.

NHTSA utilizes a briefing and interview process to provide the necessary information from which to complete the program technical assessment. The information needed to conduct the assessment is collected through written materials and a series of interviews and presentations made by key persons associated with driver education program activities in the State. These persons represent both the public and private sectors and State and local levels. Following each briefing, technical assessment team members enter into a free and open discussion with each of the presenters so that the team can get as clear an understanding of the current status of each driver education program component as possible. The briefing should represent all the components of a comprehensive driver education program. Thus, persons with the following aspects of the driver education program should brief the team: program management, legislation, regulation and policy, driver education training, instructor qualifications, parental involvement/communication, driver licensing/enforcement and program evaluation and data. If applicable, both public and commercial providers of driver education should brief the team. The State office is responsible for selecting the particular persons to make presentations and be interviewed by the technical assessment team. The State is responsible for preparing a status report on the driver education program and assembling any background information sent to the technical assessment team members. The quality of the team recommendations is a direct correlation with the breadth of presentations and background information provided to the team. This briefing package should be sent to team members thirty (30) days prior to the beginning of the assessment. After the briefing material has been delivered to the team members, a conference

call to review the briefing book and the agenda will be scheduled. This package should be prepared electronically and printed. Bulleted lists of information and materials that can help the State prepare its briefing book can be found in Appendix 4.

Following the completion of the comprehensive briefing process, the technical assessment team convenes to review and analyze the information that has been presented, develop recommendations, and create the draft final report. The team members compare the State program components to those in the *Novice Teen Driver Education and Training Administrative Standards*, noting the strengths and weaknesses of each program component. (Note: Highway Safety Guideline #4 – Driver Education may also be considered for additional guidance.) While each team member may bring a particular expertise to the assessment, and may be responsible for writing particular sections of the final report, everyone on the team must agree with what ultimately goes into the report. Thus, the report is a consensus report prepared by the assessment team members, not NHTSA personnel. The recommendations are based on the unique characteristics of the State (e.g., political structure, demographics, mortality and morbidity profiles, institutional support) and what the team members believe the State can reasonably do to improve the effectiveness and comprehensiveness of its driver education program.

On the final day of the assessment, the technical assessment team briefs State officials on the findings of the assessment, summarizing the major points of the review and the major recommendations. State officials are responsible for invitations to the final briefing. The technical assessment team provides a draft copy of the final report to the appropriate State officials at this time. The report is a team report; it is not a NHTSA document. The State is given two weeks to review the draft report and make any **technical**, not content, corrections. The State will submit its comments and requested changes to the NHTSA personnel coordinating the assessment, and those comments will then be forwarded to the technical assessment team to determine whether sufficient information has been provided to warrant modification of the draft final report. The technical assessment team, upon review of the State's comments, instructs NHTSA personnel to modify the document as necessary and finalize the report. Once the report has been finalized, it will be transmitted to the appropriate State officials (e.g., State Highway Safety Office, State Driver Education Program Office) and NHTSA Regional Office.

## **VI. FINAL REPORT FORMAT**

The following outlines the general format of the final assessment report. The major program areas are introduced in the report with a restatement of the appropriate component of the administrative standards, followed by a narrative of the current status of the State program based on information obtained from the briefing materials and during the week of the assessment, and concludes with specific recommendations from the technical assessment team.

The following are the major components of the assessment final report:

- 1) Cover Page**
- 2) Table of Contents**

- 3) Acknowledgments**
- 4) Assessment Background**
- 5) Introduction**
- 6) Priority Recommendations**
- 7) Program Review and Analysis**
  - a) Program Administration
  - b) Education/Training
  - c) Instructor Qualifications
  - d) Parental Involvement
  - e) Coordination with Driver Licensing

**Appendix 1 Credentials of Technical Assessment Team**

**Appendix 2 Assessment Agenda**