Technical assistance is a broad term, covering a vast array of services. But what does it mean, exactly? For TAESE (Technical Assistance for Excellence in Special Education), a division of the Center for Persons with Disabilities at Utah State University, it might mean handling the logistics of a national or international conference for several hundred people from start to finish. This could include making arrangements for the venue and hotel, finding speakers and arranging travel for them, developing a promotional strategy and marketing opportunities, developing online registration and other materials, collecting registration fees and paying invoices, preparing signage and other printed materials, arranging for continuing education credits, managing booth assignments for exhibitors, providing staff to work at the venue and monitor functions, and managing participant contact information for future events.

Cindy Budge, conference and event coordinator at TAESE, said planning started in January for a recent event in Sun Valley, Idaho. “Every year, the Idaho Department of Education does a CEC (Council for Exceptional Children) conference,” Budge said. “This year, it was combined with the Division of Learning Disabilities, a national entity, so they brought in some really good presenters.” The event was well-attended, Budge said, with 300 participants, 41 presenters and 20 exhibitors. Attendees were able to register online for the event, as well as update their membership, book a hotel room, make luncheon reservations, or register for three pre-conferences and two post-conferences. “Everything is right there on the web site, and everything can be done all at once,” Budge said. “We put all the materials online, including presenter biographies and photos and all their presentation materials.” TAESE staff members also create all the posters and signage to help attendees get to where they need to be. “Many of these conferences are planned by people who have a full-time job already,” Budge said, so having TAESE coordinate the event means those people don’t have to worry about the details. “When the conference starts they can network instead of having to check people in. It really frees up the conference staff.” Recent TAESE events include the Tri-State Law Conference with more than 1,000 attendees, the Utah Law Conference with 900 attendees, the Kansas Winter Leadership Conference, the Kansas Division of Early Childhood (KDEC) Conference, Montana Teacher Training Programs, the Wyoming Leadership Conference, the Kansas Summer Leadership Conference, the Utah
Institute, the Kansas MTSS Symposium and the Nebraska Monitoring Conference.