



Managing Technical Support

A Guide for Organizations

Acknowledgements

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ABOUT US

The Technical Support Facility (TSF) was established by UNAIDS in 2005 to provide high-quality, short-term technical assistance and build in-country capacity to scale up the HIV response. Currently, there are three UNAIDS-supported TSFs, located in the Asia Pacific, Eastern and Southern Africa, and West and Central Africa regions.

WHAT WE DO:

Located in Johannesburg, South Africa, the TSF Eastern and Southern Africa (TSF ESA), provides five types of services to the 21 countries in the ESA region:

- Defining and clarifying technical support needs
- Sourcing qualified consultants
- Contract management
- Quality assurance
- Capacity development of in-country partners
- Training and development of consultants

We work across the following areas to support HIV, health and community systems strengthening programmes:

- Strategic and operational planning
- Organisational assessment and development
- Capacity improvement plans
- Technical support mapping
- Global Fund grant support
- Monitoring and evaluation (M&E)
- Resource mobilization, tracking and optimization
- Gender and human rights
- Key populations
- Sustainability and transition planning

HOW TO ACCESS OUR SERVICES:

TSF services are available to government ministries, National AIDS Commissions, Country Coordinating Mechanisms, Global Fund grant recipients, civil society organisations, and other international and national partners in the health and social sectors. The TSF is supported by UNAIDS and its cosponsors as part of their strategy to help strengthen co-ordination and capacity for effective responses at country level.

TSF services can be accessed through the UNAIDS country office, or contact the TSF ESA directly at info@tsfesa.org

The TSF ESA's emphasis on mobilizing and up-skilling national and regional consultants in close cooperation with UNAIDS counterparts gives us a unique opportunity to improve health programmes and systems in a context-specific manner.



INTRODUCTION

This guide is a tool to facilitate the effective use of technical support in health and social sector programmes. It has been designed to help organisations and individuals plan, manage, and monitor technical support, particularly for work with external consultants.

1.1 PURPOSE AND USE OF THIS GUIDE

By using this guide, the quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of technical support can be maximized to achieve organisational objectives.

Technical support is a useful tool for organisations to move their activities forward while simultaneously developing their internal capacities in a changing environment.

1.2 DEFINING TECHNICAL SUPPORT

The term technical support refers to both technical assistance and capacity development.

- Technical assistance refers to an engagement, which is usually short-term, to fulfil a specific task or complete a deliverable.
- Capacity building refers to training, mentorship, knowledge sharing, or twinning to increase the skills and capabilities of a team or individuals in certain technical, operational, or managerial areas.

This guide primarily describes planning for technical assistance, but can also be used to inform the identification, planning, and monitoring of capacity-building activities.

1.3 ENSURING RESULTS

Technical support is a useful tool for organisations to move their activities forward while simultaneously developing their internal capacities in a changing environment. The health and social development field can be complex, with shifting priorities and donors, and the introduction of new technologies or programmatic approaches. The use of external technical support is not an admission of failure, dependence, or poor performance, but rather can be a valuable investment for bridging immediate capacity gaps. To get the most out of technical support, the process should be properly planned, managed, and monitored.

Technical support involves multiple parties, including the client (the recipient of technical support), the consultant(s), essential in-country stakeholders, and potentially a technical support provider (a third-party organisation that supports technical support management). Because of these relationships, it is important to clarify the roles of parties involved, ensure that the output(s) match the client's needs and the country context, and that there is adequate ownership of the output(s).

To improve the effectiveness of technical support, the following components are essential, and are detailed in this guide to ensure successful technical support:

- Improved planning, coordination, and prioritization of technical support needs
- Coherent and clear terms of reference (ToR)
- Sufficient preparation for the assignment
- Early engagement, close and continuous relationship management of all relevant stakeholders
- Matching consultant's interpersonal and technical skills to the assignment
- Adequate resources for the consultant
- Well-defined objectives, deliverables, and work plans
- Efficient assignment tracking and monitoring



PLANNING FOR TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Good planning for technical support sets the stage for cost-effectiveness and an optimal outcome. A comprehensive technical support plan can link different pieces of work to make sure they build on each other to achieve results.

Technical support planning is a participatory process of identifying national or organisational capacity gaps and possible solutions to address them. Technical support plans should be developed in line with national or organisation-specific strategic and operational plans to ensure that all efforts help to achieve planned goals and objectives. Technical support planning includes:

- Mapping
- Prioritisation
- External support
- Consultant identification
- Scoping
- Budgeting

The TSF ESA uses a needs assessment matrix to help clients determine organisational technical support needs. See Annex 1.

TIP

Programme leaders and managers should keep a running list of potential gaps or needs based on meetings, observations, discussions, or updates in their field, and consider those in the mapping process. This can help identify operational issues that may be the root cause of technical issues and needs that may not be visible in existing reports.

Technical support plans are usually developed for a one- to two-year period. Coordination and monitoring mechanisms must be in place to support the effective and timely implementation of the plan.

2.1 MAPPING: IDENTIFYING ISSUES AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

In a health or social development programme, the first step of technical support planning is a needs assessment. These needs typically involve:

- Areas of poor programmatic or operational performance
- Implementation bottlenecks
- Organisational capacity gaps
- Assistance integrating new developments or priorities

Methods for identifying these needs include reviewing findings from organisational capacity-assessment tools, programme reviews, performance assessments, monitoring and evaluation metrics, international or national guidance, or by soliciting feedback from key stakeholders. In the case of underperformance or programmatic bottlenecks, it is essential to probe the issue deeply to identify the root cause(s) rather than pursue a solution that may only address the symptoms of the real issue.

For each identified need, potential solutions or mitigation measures should be identified in consultation with a range of relevant stakeholders. These potential solutions can be determined by consulting with experts, identifying best practices or successful lessons from the literature, and reviewing national and international guidelines.

The solutions to some issues may seem obvious. For example, revising a national strategic plan that is expiring generally requires an evaluation followed by a validated, updated national strategic plan. However, in many cases external support is required to identify an appropriate solution. This task of identifying potential solutions can actually be included as a need in the technical support plan.

2.2 PRIORITISATION: BALANCING COST-EFFECTIVENESS, TIMING, AND OWNERSHIP

Prioritisation is the process for determining which activities to invest in and how those activities should be scheduled. Given time and resource limitations, it is usually not possible to address every identified need for technical support, at least not at the same time. In addition, fixing certain high-priority problems can have a bigger effect than fixing others and may reduce the need to implement other proposed actions.

Some areas to consider in prioritising activities include:

- Cost-effectiveness
- Timing
- Ownership

Cost-effectiveness: Rather than looking only at the total cost of an assignment, technical support planning requires that the effectiveness and potential impact of the intervention be balanced against the cost to achieve it. Hiring external consultants can pose a significant cost to the organisation or programme, but sometimes the benefits far outweigh the initial investment. In other cases, the consultant output might have little impact on the overall success or failure of the programme. Activities with limited cost-effectiveness should be deprioritised or eliminated in favour of those with high cost-effectiveness.

The cost-effectiveness of potential solutions can be determined using the estimated total cost compared with estimates of the potential impact. Estimated total cost, based on budget items, can be determined using comparable assignments or national or international benchmarks. Some questions to consider when determining the potential impact include:

- Will implementing this solution benefit broader health, social, or management systems, or does it only affect one particular programme?
- Can implementing this solution allow other work streams to progress more efficiently?
- Will this investment result in short- or long-term benefits, or both? How does that align with the current context?
- Can implementing this solution reduce the need to implement other solutions, thus reducing costs?

While cost-effectiveness is generally more important than the total cost of an assignment alone, even cost-effective assignments may need to be deprioritised if they cannot be fully funded.

The TSF ESA collaborates with organisations to prioritise needs and work out how they can be addressed. A strong emphasis is placed on identifying what is available in-country, the most effective modality, and activities prioritised in the Technical Support plan. For further information on this service, contact us at info@tsfesa.org

Timing: Particular milestones or programme goals are often interrelated, so technical support needs should be mapped against programme timelines to determine which activities should come first. Timing can also be determined by assessing the urgency and importance of particular tasks.

- Can the assignment be completed within programmatic timelines?
- Which challenges need to be addressed quickly to avoid bottlenecks for other work?
- What are the most urgent needs of the programme?
- What are the most important tasks to accomplish?
- Are there holidays, election periods, or other potential delays that might affect the delivery of technical support?
- Is there enough time allotted for planning and preparing each technical support assignment?

Interest and ownership: If the organisation or other critical stakeholders do not have the ability or interest to follow up on the recommendations and outputs that arise from technical support, then the support should not be commissioned. Before committing funds to technical support, the organisation and stakeholders need to address the following questions:

- Are there forthcoming changes in the political environment that might affect the activity or programme?
- Is there sufficient internal capacity to properly manage a technical support assignment?
- Is there commitment or goodwill towards implementing the outcomes of a technical support assignment?

2.3 EXTERNAL SUPPORT: DETERMINING WHEN TO USE EXTERNAL CONSULTANTS OR TECHNICAL SUPPORT PROVIDERS

An organisation needs to decide whether solutions can be implemented using internal capacity (staff) or whether external support will be required. External capacity may include hiring a consultant directly, but it could also include engaging a technical support provider to manage the technical support process.

Using external capacity should not be considered a way of outsourcing regular staff work but rather of acquiring specific, time-bound technical knowledge that is not available internally. The added cost of engaging an external consultant or technical support provider should be balanced with the potential effectiveness of their work. External consultants are useful in situations when:

- Services are of a short or limited duration, or are sporadic over time
- Hiring a full- or part-time staff member cannot be justified
- Need for a specific skill or technical expertise beyond staff capabilities
- An independent opinion is needed
- Present staff capacity is over-stretched
- New legislative, policy, or technical guidance need to be adopted

Some examples of tasks that are appropriate for external consultants include:

- Design and deliver a specific training course (such as the implementation of new treatment guidelines or training in aspects of project management)
- Evaluate the impact of a project, program, or service
- Conduct workshops to solicit input and feedback from various stakeholders
- Develop technical guidance or reports
- Conduct assessments, surveys, or studies

Various organisations prefer working with technical support providers to help them clarify their needs and to cost and manage technical support interventions.

Technical support providers are useful because they have ample experience managing technical support. They are uniquely positioned to share information on common themes in technical support and can assist with the following:

- Clarifying organisational needs and refining the terms of reference in accordance with organisational needs
- Reducing the time to find quality-assured consultants to support a client organisation by making use of their networks and/or databases
- Undertaking consultant contract management and quality assurance, monitoring the consultant's work to assure it is of good quality and meets the client's standards

For each associated activity in the technical support plan, the use of external consultants should be indicated.



2.4 SCOPING: WRITING THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

The terms of reference (ToR) document defines all aspects of what a consultant or a team will be expected to deliver for an assignment. It defines the objectives and the scope of the assignment, outlines the responsibilities of the consultant or team, and provides a clear description of the resources available to complete the assignment. Developing an accurate and specific ToR is a critical step in managing high-quality technical support because the ToR sets the parameters for measuring the success of the assignment.

The specific content and format for a ToR will vary based on organisational requirements, local practices, and the type of assignment. Additionally the ToR should clearly define the background, objectives, deliverables, and clear output indicators, in accordance with the technical support planned. Particular reference should be made to the transfer of knowledge and skills to the client organisation in order to strengthen national capacity.

When developing the ToR, the organisation must consider all relevant stakeholders whose contribution or inputs are required for the successful completion of the assignment and implementation of recommendations. Stakeholders' comments and other inputs should be integrated into the final ToR. This upfront involvement can greatly improve the uptake of recommendations or use of outputs from the consultancy following the assignment.

The ToR should also include all components specified by the organisation's contracting and procurement procedures or other internal requirements. If the assignment is externally managed, the contracting and procurement procedures of the managing organisation may have to be considered if they are different from those of the client organisation.

See Annex 2, a template describing areas to be covered in the preparation and review of a ToR.

TIP

Once you have a working draft of the ToR, share it with someone who isn't familiar with the assignment to see if they can understand what is required based on the document alone. This can help to reveal gaps or imprecise language in the ToR before it is finalized.

The TSF-ESA uses local or regional consultants whenever possible, to ensure a strong understanding of the contextual environment. The consultants are expected to work closely with in-country stakeholders in a collaborative manner to assure ownership of deliverables.

2.5 CONSULTANT IDENTIFICATION: TENDERING OR USING A TECHNICAL SUPPORT PROVIDER

There are several channels available to organisations when they need to select a consultant, including public tendering, using networks or referrals, or engaging the services of a technical support provider. The greatest challenge is finding a consultant who delivers high-quality work, has the correct technical and “soft” skills for the assignment, and who is available when needed.

It is essential that potential consultants are able to meet the requirements of the terms of reference. Consultants need to have the necessary skills, knowledge, experience, and attitudes to fulfil their role. Depending on the type of assignment the expectations may include:

- Relevant technical expertise and qualifications
- Relevant experience
- Demonstrated sensitivity about contextual and cultural perspectives
- Good analytical skills
- Good communication and presentation skills
- Ability to facilitate discussion and information sharing
- Demonstration of good teamwork and networking skills
- Ability to write clearly and concisely
- Ability to meet deadlines

It is important to check that the CV relates to the assignment expectations. It is often difficult to assess a candidate's suitability from a CV. Once a short list of potential candidates is selected, interviews and reference checks should be conducted, including requesting samples of past work, to verify their abilities. See Annex 3 for a table of criteria that can be used for consultant identification/selection.

Technical support providers can be useful resources for reducing the time and effort for recruitment and tendering processes, especially when there is limited ability to manage a procurement / tendering process, there is a need for more independence in consultant identification, or the assignment requires expertise in a highly specific area.

The TSF ESA maintains an extensive database of quality-assured consultants who have had their references checked and are known for their excellent standard of work. TSF ESA staff can develop a shortlist of consultants based on the assignment requirements.

2.6 BUDGETING: COSTING AND FUNDING ACTIVITIES

Costing of interventions at this stage cannot be precise, but the rough estimates should take into account all resources required to implement the solution or mitigation measure. Typically, technical support tends to be under-budgeted; it is prudent to ensure that there are adequate funds to properly deliver the assignment, which can also be factored into the budget through appropriate contingency funds.

When organisations fund technical support from their own resources, they tend to be highly committed to and invested in the planning process, the execution of technical support, and the implementation of recommendations or findings. However, it may not always be possible to fund technical support from national or organisational resources. In these cases, organisations can seek technical support funding from various sources, including technical support providers, United Nations agencies, and other technical partners.

Organisations that obtain external technical support funding generally network and maintain consistent communication with technical partners and possible funders. They remain informed about the funding environment, and know how to identify and engage with technical partners whose objectives align with their own.



MANAGING TECHNICAL SUPPORT

There are three components to managing the assignment or consultancy: preparatory work, monitoring active assignments, and finalising or close-out. All components of an engagement should integrate quality assurance (QA) processes. (Cross-cutting QA will be discussed in a separate section.)

Project and/or programme managers need to be actively involved in consultant assignments to ensure their success. Consultancies do not necessarily reduce work for managers and other stakeholders – but good planning of the process from preparatory work like ToR development to the active assignment and follow-up will bring about positive results.

The TSF ESA can help an organisation enforce contracts and ensure delivery of outputs. If an assignment is not managed through the TSF ESA, a contract or a letter of agreement should be signed by both the consultant and the contracting organisation to guide the assignment.

3.1 PREPARATORY WORK PRIOR TO THE CONSULTANT ARRIVING ON ASSIGNMENT

Assignment preparation covers all the planning necessary to ensure the day-to-day delivery of the assignment is successful. Experience has shown that this preparation has a major influence on the success of an assignment. Preparatory work for an assignment can be divided into six activities, which are outlined below. Annex 4 includes a checklist for activities in this stage of a consultancy.

3.1.1 Raising stakeholder awareness about issues the consultancy will address and ensuring their cooperation and support

Ideally, multiple stakeholders should be involved in preparing and validating the ToR for an assignment. This may not be possible, or it may make the process inefficient and cumbersome where there are a large number of relevant stakeholders. However, it is important to ensure that all stakeholders have a copy of the ToR and are well briefed about the assignment before it begins. It is difficult for a consultant to start work with stakeholders who do not know or understand the assignment objectives. Mobilizing stakeholders is especially important if a consultant is expected to report to a reference group constituted by different stakeholders.

3.1.2 Contracting the consultant

Contracting the consultant has three primary components: the terms and conditions, budget, and definition of scope. Organisations should have a contract template that has been checked by a lawyer. In drafting the contract, expectations of all concerned parties should be discussed and agreed upon. Terms and conditions of the relationship, scope of work, budget, methodology, deadlines and timelines are essential contractual issues to be considered. The contract protects the client organisation and consultant against poor performance and unreasonable expectations, respectively. Under normal circumstances, a consultant should not start any work on an assignment until his/her contract is agreed to and signed by both parties.

3.1.3 The appointment and briefing of an assignment manager

A key characteristic of effective technical assistance is the appointment of a client counterpart or assignment manager who works closely with a consultant. An assignment manager is usually the individual who has direct responsibility for the work to be performed. If a consultant is expected to work with an assignment manager, they should have a clearly defined role and adequate time to work with the consultant. It is best to describe the role of an assignment manager in the ToR to avoid any misunderstanding between the client organisation, assignment manager, and consultant. The time to be spent working together should be clearly identified within the work plans of both parties. The assignment manager's role in reviewing and approving deliverables is also important to clarify early in the process.

3.1.4 The collection of documentation

Consultants engaged for any assignment need adequate time to read and reflect on background information. It is the responsibility of the assignment manager, or key client contact person, to identify and/or collect relevant documentation prior to an assignment and share it with the consultant before he or she conducts field work. A review of background material is essential to prepare the consultant to work more effectively once in the field.

3.1.5 Planning and scheduling assignment activities

A programme of activities needs to be drawn up by the assignment manager and consultant prior to the start of the assignment. The activities include meetings and visits that will help the consultant deliver the outputs specified in the ToR. The programme should be detailed and give realistic time allocations for meetings, background reading, or similar activities. If workshops are planned, participants need to be selected and invitations sent. The assignment manager and consultant should discuss the programme either prior to the start of the assignment or at their first meeting together. All key meetings should be reconfirmed closer to the start date of the assignment.



3.1.6 Making logistical arrangements

Good logistical arrangements underpin an effective assignment, particularly for assignments that are away from the consultant's home. Logistical arrangements include:

- Transportation
- Accommodation
- A workspace for the consultant when on assignment
- Communication—such as access to the internet and/or telephone
- Booking meeting or training rooms
- Availability of audio-visual and other equipment

It is useful to have a checklist of all administrative and logistical arrangements needed for an assignment, along with a timetable for completing them. An assignment manager needs to review the checklist at regular intervals before the assignment begins. It is also prudent to check with the consultant 48 hours before the assignment starts to verify that logistical arrangements have made and that he or she is aware of the schedule. Annex 4 presents a checklist to assist in managing preparatory work prior the active assignment stage.

3.2 ACTIVE ASSIGNMENT MANAGEMENT

Active assignment management starts when the consultant contract has been signed and ends when the assignment outputs have been approved. Both the assignment manager and the consultant are responsible for ensuring proper management and delivery of the assignment. An experienced consultant will work with an assignment manager to ensure that the assignment is realistic, efficient, and effective. In some cases, the best path is often revealed only after the assignment has begun. This need for flexibility makes it all the more important to select a competent consultant who can work with the client and stakeholders to complete assignments that will further their long-term as well as their short-term goals. Annex 5 includes a checklist for this stage of a consultancy.

3.2.1 Conducting a kick-off or inception discussion

The assignment manager and selected consultant should arrange an initial meeting or phone call to review and reconfirm the agreed terms, conditions, ways of working, proposed approach, and identification of key stakeholders as soon as the contract is signed. The initial briefing discussion may involve only the assignment manager and the consultant, or it can be expanded to include other stakeholders who may be engaged in the assignment. The work plan may be altered at this time, if necessary. All changes should be made in writing and may be added as an addendum to the original contract. The changes may include the scope, reporting lines, or timelines. The consultant should use this platform to request other relevant information or documentation. It is also important for the assignment manager to clarify what will happen if deadlines are missed due to unforeseen circumstances.

The assignment manager can help consultants quickly build good relationships with stakeholders by informing them about local practices and customs. For example, a consultant would benefit from knowing about the level of formality in government ministries and dress codes. Any potential sensitivities or complexities in working with stakeholders should also be mentioned at this time.

3.2.2 Organising a welcome and stakeholder introduction

Often consultants will meet their assignment manager for the first time when they arrive to start their service, often at an airport, bus, or train station. Organising a welcome helps create a good first impression and fosters a good working relationship. As part of the welcome, the client assignment focal point should introduce the consultant to the key members of the project / programme team as soon as possible. This can be done with a meeting for key stakeholders to meet the consultant, and for the

consultant to share the approach and key milestones of the assignment. The assignment manager can organise an informal social event to introduce the consultant to stakeholders, facilitating better working relations. Such events can also be useful at the end of an assignment to allow an informal debriefing on the process and the lessons of the assignment.

3.2.3 Overseeing and monitoring

Overseeing and monitoring work progress is the paramount task of active assignment management. Through oversight and monitoring, the assignment manager can identify any divergence from the agreed approach to the work, the work plan, or the schedule. Oversight allows the client organisation to prepare for any significant changes and to properly guide the consultant through the successful completion of the assignment.

3.2.3.1 Developing trust

The relationship between the consultant and the assignment manager should be based on mutual respect and trust. When trust breaks down, consultancies face a high risk of failure. Mutual trust and respect ease communication, facilitating frank discussions of all assignment issues, negative or positive. This honesty encourages both parties to assess impact of these issues on existing time schedules and the final deliverables. It also provides an opportunity for important positive feedback for the consultant when things are going well.

3.2.3.2 Monitoring and ‘scope creep’

The assignment manager monitors the consultant’s progress according to the agreed work plan and guides the consultant where required. Even highly experienced consultants will benefit from monitoring and guidance. Often consultants need active support to make sure that they get the necessary information and cooperation to do their assignment effectively and efficiently.

Monitoring an assignment also allows the manager to check for “scope creep”. Scope creep occurs when the consultant is asked to work on issues and activities not originally included in the ToR. Where scope creep is unavoidable, the reasons for additional work must be discussed with the consultant and necessary changes to the assignment work plan must be negotiated and approved. This usually requires review and amendment of the contract, including the budget.

3.2.3.3 Sticking to deadlines

Regular oversight of deadlines and setting schedules for report drafts are an important component of monitoring. Deadlines keep consultants focused and ensure good time management. Consultants may lose interest in

the assignment if the client does not show interest in the deliverables. An assignment manager must make sure that times are set for regular reporting and feedback from reference groups, key stakeholders, and the client.

3.2.3.4 Finalizing deliverables or outputs

It is important for the assignment manager to arrange the sign-off of the final deliverables. Sometimes this rests with the assignment manager. Sometimes a committee, task team, or a senior manager will sign off the final deliverables. The appropriate approver should be notified in advance by the assignment manager, with proper time set aside to review and approve in a timely manner.

See Annex 5, a checklist for active assignment management.



The TSF ESA provides feedback forms to both clients and consultants. This information is reviewed at regular meetings and used to facilitate continuous quality improvement. This feedback is valuable for informing and improving future assignments.

3.3 ASSIGNMENT FINALIZATION AND THE WAY FORWARD

It is important to have a procedure to close and finalize an assignment once the deliverables have been finalized.

3.3.1 Debriefing and feedback

The assignment manager and the consultant should hold a debriefing session to review the assignment process and identify important strengths and weaknesses of the process. Any lessons learned from the assignment should to be applied in the planning for future work. The assignment manager can use this opportunity to provide feedback to the consultant on what worked well and what could have been improved. The client can also receive feedback from the consultant on where he or she thought the assignment could have been managed differently for a better result. The assignment manager should also use this as an opportunity to ask the consultant for their advice on next steps for using the deliverables from the assignment to achieve longer-term organizational goals.

If using a technical support provider, they may request feedback on the assignment from both the client and the consultant. This feedback is valuable for informing and improving future assignments.

3.3.2 Administrative closure

Timely payment in accordance with the contract with the consultant is part of good management practice. Late or missed payments can be damaging to the reputation of the organization and are demotivating to the consultant.

Proceed to review and finalize assignment closure activities, such as formally closing all contracts and obligations in line with the contract and any internal organizational requirements.

3.3.3 Information distribution and filing

Information from a consulting assignment should be archived for future reference. The type of information archived will differ depending on the scope and type of assignment, but items such as the ToR, bids received, contract, budget, assignment management documents, status reports, final deliverables and key communications should be considered. The final deliverable and update on the close-out of the assignment should be shared with all key stakeholders engaged in the work.

3.3.4 Taking forward the recommendations

As mentioned earlier, an assignment should not be commissioned if the contracting organisation does not have the capacity to follow through on implementing its outputs or recommendations. An assignment manager plays an important role in taking the assignment outputs forward. For example, if an evaluation has been conducted, then an assignment manager could convene a team to act on the recommendations. It is important to plan activities that take place once the assignment is complete. This may include identifying needs for further consultant support or staff training. Sometimes this might involve extending the consultant's contract to help ensure that the recommendations are widely understood and to help plan follow-up activities.

Annex 6 presents a checklist to assist in assignment close-out.

3.4 ENSURING QUALITY

Ensuring high-quality technical support is a shared priority for technical and country partners. As mentioned previously, QA cuts across all stages of the assignment. It is a process that helps to identify and manage risks at key stages of consultancies to improve results.

Key aspects of a good QA process in assignment management are:

- Clarifying the ToR to ensure that assignments are well planned, and that tasks and expectations are clear
- Pre-screening consultant skills, experiences and references
- Closely matching consultant skills and experience with client needs
- Assisting clients and consultants to plan and manage assignments for optimum outcomes
- Monitoring the quality of consultants' outputs
- Obtaining client and consultant feedback on each assignment—including multi-stakeholder peer reviews—to facilitate and drive continuous quality improvement, including the use of multi-stakeholder peer reviews
- Linking payment to approval of deliverables

The TSF ESA works with both client organisations and consultants to improve results of consultancies. We use a number of tools to ensure that assignments are managed consistently and aims to achieve client satisfaction at all times.



4.

SUMMARY

Consultants provide knowledge and experience to tackle projects or unravel problems that are beyond the client's capabilities at a given time. Consultants can be a great asset to organisations, as long as their work is properly planned and budgeted, and they are briefed, managed, and supported to deliver. As resources are increasingly limited, it is important for organizations to focus their investments on areas where they can have the most impact, and to maximize the outputs from those investments to achieve real results.

The TSF ESA is a partner to organizations in the region. Visit our website or contact us if we can assist in your technical support needs.



ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: TECHNICAL SUPPORT NEEDS ASSESSMENT MATRIX

Goal: Reduce new infections by 50% by 2012

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1. 80% OF POPULATION HAS ADOPTED APPROPRIATE HIV PREVENTION MEASURES

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE	BOTTLENECK	UNDERLYING CAPACITY CHALLENGE	LONG TERM TECHNICAL SUPPORT ACTIONS	PRIORITY TECHNICAL SUPPORT INTERVENTIONS
	What are the bottlenecks (gaps and obstacles) hindering the implementation of the national response?	Which component of the bottleneck can be addressed through technical support?	Which broad technical support action is required to overcome the capacity challenge during the time of the NSP?	Which priority technical support interventions are feasible and can be carried out in the first year (or two years)?
Ensure access to a comprehensive prevention package of services for 90% of key populations	Incomplete package of prevention services delivered Legal framework hinders access to services, e.g. condoms, needle exchange	Lack of a national strategy for HIV prevention in prisons	Development and adoption of a national HIV prevention strategy for prisons	Carry out analysis of HIV situation in prisons

Source: Joint United Nations Programmes on HIV/ AIDS (UNAIDS) 2010, Guidance note on intensification of Technical support at the country level: Planning and managing technical support

ANNEX 2: TEMPLATE FOR THE PREPARATION AND REVIEW OF THE TERMS OF REFERENCE (TOR)

NAME OF ORGANISATION:	
ASSIGNMENT TITLE:	
CONTRACT NAME:	TRACKING NUMBER:
CLIENT/COUNTRY:	TOR PREPARED BY:
Background: Provide general context of the project or programme being supported along with key milestones in its history. This allows the	ToR to show how the assignment fits within the broader programme. Include assignment-specific information and background information as appropriate.
Purpose & objectives: State the overall purpose of the assignment and specific objectives of the assignment.	
Scope & tasks: State the scope of work including the proposed methodology, specific tasks to be completed, and expected outcomes.	
Deliverables / outputs: - Specific information about the types of products (for example reports or presentations), who will use them, and how they will be used. Ideally, each product will be listed separately to specify its individual requirements and timeline. - The structure and format for each product. This would include any expectations regarding length and content (for example, the order of sections or the inclusion of an executive summary).	- The language(s) in which deliverables should be written. - Organisational standards and practices. Any established style guide or standard formats for written documents should be referred to here. The timeframe for products, including milestones. - Required meetings/consultations. This section should also note the frequency and types of meetings expected with the evaluation commissioner and other stakeholders of the evaluation.
Resources Give details about specific counterparts Describe other important stakeholders	Describe the role and composition of a project/assignment task team/steering committee if needed
TA selection criteria: List the skills and experience of the consultant/s needed for the assignment. Include: qualifications, technical skills, number of years of relevant work experience, a description of the seniority of	consultant needed, language skills and any specific details related to availability, for example, must be able to work in Windhoek for 4 weeks Describe the sourcing policy for the assignment
Time & scheduling: State the start and finish date of the assignment (state whether dates are flexible)	State any other important deadlines for interim deliverables such as the date when a draft report is first required
Budget: A budget for the assignment including proposed number of days must be included, unless you are issuing a tender that requests bidders to compete on cost. Budget for other costs related to the consultant appointment including air travel, ground transport, accommodation, per diem, visa costs, communication (internet/phone), and other items as	necessary, for example, workshop costs, assignment management fees. The budget section should also indicate what the client organisation will provide to the consultant for the assignment that would not be considered consultant expenses (eg. shared working space in the client's office, meeting rooms, printing, the organisation's transport, etc.)
General: If the ToR is still a draft then it is important to state this. State to whom the consultant/s will report to and any other issues	related to accountability. Clearly indicate a deadline for application.

ANNEX 3: TABLE OF CRITERIA FOR CONSULTANT IDENTIFICATION

The template can be adjusted to meet the specific requirements of a consultancy:

ATTRIBUTES:	ESSENTIAL (E) OR DESIRABLE (D):
Knowledge and Qualifications Degree or certification requirements (eg. Master's degree in Public Health, Business Administration, or a related discipline) Previous experience in related work (eg. 10 years' experience in HIV programming for key populations) Experience working in inter-sectoral teams Experience working in multi-disciplinary teams Knowledge of country context (legal, social, cultural) Previous experience working in a particular country or with a particular agency	
Skills Specific technical skills Training and facilitation skills Mentoring and coaching skills Report writing Qualitative research skills Quantitative research skills	
Other Good references from reputable organisations/ individuals Language skills	

ANNEX 4: PREPARATORY CHECKLIST

	DUE DATE	DONE OR N/A
Stakeholder involvement		
• Key stakeholders briefed about consultancy to enhance cooperation and acceptance		
• Confirm assignment objectives/deliverables with key stakeholders		
• Assignment manager identified		
• Assignment manager knows roles and responsibilities for assignment and is available for the specified time		
• Align assignment manager work plan with consultant work plan to ensure efficient role and participation		
Contracting the consultant		
• Negotiate and finalise scope of work and payment terms		
• Clarify and agree on terms and conditions of the relationship		
• Clarify issues around conflict of interest, if necessary		
Documentation		
• All relevant briefing documentation identified and collated		
• Send available background material for consultant		
Planning and scheduling assignment activities		
• Formal timetable developed and meetings, visits, etc., arranged		
• Initial briefing meeting(s) set up with appropriate participants		
• Proposed programme checked with consultant		
• Key meetings re-confirmed closer to the start date of the assignment		
Logistics		
• Confirm person who will be responsible for liaison and logistics, particularly if the project manager cannot perform the role		
• Confirm and circulate contact details of consultant to stakeholders		
• Arrange flights and visa and enquire about health requirements, with travel agent		
• Provisionally book hotel		
• Confirm consultant's visa		
• Confirm flights, hotels, local transport arrangements		
• Confirm insurance if necessary		
• Arrange advances to consultants or hotel, if necessary		
• Send final logistics information and timetable to consultant		
• Check with consultant 48 hours before departure		
• Arrange work space for consultant on arrival		

ANNEX 5: ACTIVE ASSIGNMENT MANAGEMENT CHECKLIST

	DUE DATE	DONE OR N/A
Initial inception briefing and work plan confirmation (by phone or in person as soon as contract is signed)		
• Specific ToR issues identified for clarification and finalization before or at start of consultancy		
• Clarify any specific issues related to the contract		
• Detailed work-plan shared and agreed upon		
• Clarify issues around time management e.g. what happens when deadlines are not met due to unforeseen circumstances		
• Confirm reporting schedule and milestones		
• Format, uses and target audiences of final outputs clarified		
• Clarify communications channels, levels of authority and accountability, and approvals		
• Respond to questions or need for clarification from consultant		
Welcome and stakeholder introduction		
• Arrange meeting for consultant to meet with broader group of stakeholders		
• Welcome consultant on arrival to start assignment		
Monitoring and oversight		
• Check in with consultant periodically to check on progress		
• Request regular/appropriate update meetings or briefings from the consultant		
• Formal feedback sessions scheduled and attendees confirmed, when broader stakeholder input is required		
• Ensure adequate time for attendees to read materials if necessary		
• Agree on schedule for draft report submission		
Finalizing deliverables		
• Final deliverables received		
• Validation of deliverables with stakeholders		
• Approval of deliverables		

ANNEX 6: ASSIGNMENT CLOSURE CHECKLIST

	DUE DATE	DONE OR N/A
Assignment debriefing and feedback		
• Debriefing meeting held with consultant on what worked, what didn't, what could be improved in the future, and the next steps in taking the output from the assignment forward		
• Consultant questionnaire sent (if used for feedback)		
• Areas for improvement noted and shared with relevant stakeholders		
Administrative closure		
• Outstanding invoices paid in line with contract		
• Any other contract close-out activities required by the organization are undertaken		
Information distribution and filing		
• File all key documents from the assignment, including ToR, bids received, contract, budget, work plan, final deliverables, key communications, and feedback		
• Disseminate the final deliverable and outcome of the consultancy with all key stakeholders involved with the project		
Take the recommendations forward		
• Immediately plan for the next steps associated with the assignment outcome		
• Schedule relevant meetings and discussions to take the work forward		
• Engage any resources required to implement the outcome from the consultancy		

Contact Us

- To learn more about the TSF ESA
- To request our services
- To register on our consultant database

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