

# A guide to managing Short-Term Technical Assistance for HIV and AIDS programmes





## Acknowledgements

Prepared by the  
Technical Support Facility  
(TSF) Southern Africa

Design and layout by  
Gill McDowell

Artwork by  
Vusi Malindi

## For more information

To find out more about the TSF Southern Africa, to access consultants for an assignment or to register on the database of consultants, please contact the TSF Southern Africa at:

Tel: +27 (0)11 484 8217/18

Fax: +27 (0)11 484 6782

Email: [info@tsfsouthernafrica.com](mailto:info@tsfsouthernafrica.com)

Web: [www.tsfsouthernafrica.com](http://www.tsfsouthernafrica.com)



# CONTENTS

What is the Technical Support Facility Southern Africa?	2
Scope of the TSF's services	2
Who is this Guide for and how can it help me?	4
What can I find in this Guide?	4
Managing Short-Term Technical Assistance	5
Steps to effective Technical Assistant Management	5
<b>STEP 1</b> Preparing for Technical Assistance	6
<b>STEP 2</b> Matching the Assignment with a Consultant	16
<b>STEP 3</b> Managing the Assignment	20
<b>STEP 4</b> Reviewing Output and the way forward	30
The TSF TA Management Capacity Development Programme	38
TSF Southern Africa News Service	41

# What is the TECHNICAL SUPPORT FACILITY Southern Africa?

The Technical Support Facility (TSF) was established in 2005 by UNAIDS in four sites, namely Southern Africa, Eastern Africa, West and Central Africa and South East Asia and the Pacific. It was set up to respond to the growing demand for **high quality, short-term technical assistance (STTA)** in strategic areas of planning and management for the scaling-up of responses to HIV and AIDS.

The TSF Southern Africa serves Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

## The scope of the TSF's services are:

### ➤ **Finding and quality assuring consultants**

The TSF reduces the difficulties of finding good, short-term consultants by sourcing them from its database and networks. It then contracts with the consultants and actively manages and monitors their performance with clients, to ensure quality results.

### ➤ **Capacity development for technical assistance (TA) management**

The TSF supports clients to help them get the best service from the consultants they select. The TSF can, for example, help with technical assistance planning or refining Terms of Reference to ensure successful assignments.

### ➤ **Professional development for consultants**

The TSF provides needs-driven training, mentoring, guidance and other professional development activities for consultants.

## The key technical areas of HIV and AIDS programming for which the TSF can source consultants are:

- ◆ Monitoring and evaluation
- ◆ Resource tracking
- ◆ Strategic and operational planning
- ◆ Costing and budgeting
- ◆ Organisational development
- ◆ Management (including financial management)
- ◆ Partnership development
- ◆ Gender issues
- ◆ Mainstreaming



## TSF Southern Africa: CASE STUDIES of our support

### Global Fund Round Six

The TSF Southern Africa broke new ground in partnership with UNAIDS, in the Global Fund Round Six. A survey was conducted through UNAIDS Country Coordinators. This assessed which countries would apply for Round 6 and the main service areas that proposals would cover. The overall result was that five countries worked through the TSF and RST to secure assistance and funding. In addition to Southern African countries, support was also provided to Ethiopia. In total, 124 days of consultant support were provided, mainly for general proposal writing, costing and budgeting. Feedback from both clients and consultants was generally positive. They felt that the TSF was able to respond rapidly to their questions and needs. One client noted that “in every step, it is felt that TSF is genuinely concerned and strives to provide the best assistance possible”.

### Swaziland Strategic Planning

The TSF Southern Africa provided two consultants to support Swaziland's National Emergency Response Council on HIV and AIDS (NERCHA) and its partners in developing the Sectoral Plans that help to operationalise and refine budgeting for the National Strategic Plan on AIDS. The strategic planning process is now being investigated by the World Bank and UNAIDS' ASAP programme as a possible Best Practice example.

# WHO is this GUIDE for and how can it help me?

This guide is written for anyone who is involved with short-term technical assistance (often referred to as a short-term consultancy or a short-term assignment). It has been designed to assist those working with consultants on short-term assignments and will be of value to you if:

- You are a project or programme manager who uses consultants
- You fund or evaluate projects and programmes that have used consultants to complete specific pieces of work
- You are a client or country partner of the TSF Southern Africa



This guide has been written to improve the contribution of technical assistance to projects and programmes helping to mitigate the impact of the HIV and AIDS epidemic.

The aim of the guide is to prevent poor outcomes of technical assistance that ultimately impedes the scale-up of HIV and AIDS programmes in the region.

## WHAT can I find in this GUIDE?

In this guide you will find information about:

- The four steps to effective technical assistance management
- Checklists to support effective technical assistance management
- Information boxes about the TSF Southern Africa and its role in supporting the management of technical assistance, or more specifically, how the TSF Southern Africa can help support YOU.

# MANAGING Short-Term Technical Assistance

Effective TA leads to positive changes and action. Information on managing technical assistance is crucial to making sure that problems associated with short-term consultancies are avoided so that organisations obtain the maximum return on investment in technical assistance.

Some of the common problems identified with poor planning and management of technical assistance or short-term consultancies include:

- ◆ Unclear terms of reference (ToR)
- ◆ Poor assignment preparation
- ◆ Poorly defined objectives and work plans
- ◆ Inefficient assignment tracking and overall weak monitoring.

These problems often result in undermining the objectives of the project which can be costly in terms of time and money.

## STEPS to effective Technical Assistance Management

There are four main steps to the effective management of short-term technical assistance (STTA). These are:

- Preparing for STTA**
- Matching the assignment with a consultant**
- Managing the assignment**
- Reviewing output and the way forward**



Each of these steps is made up of a set of important activities. These important activities are summarised in the checklists included in the discussion of each step. You can use the checklists to ensure that you have completed all the essential tasks associated with each step.

# STEP 1

## PREPARING for Technical Assistance



This step has three components. These are:

- I. Deciding on when and why your organisation or project needs technical assistance or consultant support
- II. Planning for technical assistance
- III. Writing the Terms of Reference for an assignment

### I. DECIDING ON WHEN AND WHY STTA IS NEEDED

The very first step is to decide that a required piece of work may be best done by a consultant. This decision sounds easy, but it is this first step which many organisations and projects do hastily or leave to the last minute. It may sound trivial, but ill-considered decisions have many consequences.



Leaving the decision to use a consultant to the last minute means that the Terms of Reference for an assignment are often written in a hurry, stakeholders do not take ownership of the consultancy, procurement is rushed and the best candidate may not be selected or available. This could result in poor logistical preparation for the consultant when he / she arrives on assignment.

It is thus important for an organisation or project to clearly define why they need technical assistance and how long the consultancy is expected to last.

**Short-term consultants are used because of their specialist knowledge within particular areas.**

### **A good reason for using a consultant is when:**

- ◆ The need for the service is of a short or limited duration, or it is sporadic
- ◆ Hiring a full- or part-time staff member cannot be justified
- ◆ A specific skill is needed quickly and the task cannot be postponed until a staff member is appointed
- ◆ An independent opinion is needed
- ◆ The present capacity in an organisation is over-stretched
- ◆ There are new legislative, policy or technical requirements that the organisation needs orientation to
- ◆ A cost-effective solution is required, ensuring that other work in an organisation is able to continue.<sup>1</sup>

Some requests for consultant assistance are straightforward, but others can be complex tasks. It is essential that the task or assignment for a consultant is well-considered prior to any decisions being made.

Straightforward tasks are often intervention-based, such as:

- ◆ Design and deliver a specific training course (such as, addressing HIV and AIDS treatment protocols, counselling skills or training in aspects of project management)
- ◆ Evaluate the impact of a service (such as, sites for voluntary HIV testing or home-based care services)
- ◆ Evaluate financial controls.

In this type of assignment, it is assumed that management has correctly diagnosed the problem, so that the consultant can provide the specified service and that changes will be embraced by the organisation or project.

More complex problems involve diagnosis of a problem and building buy-in and commitment from all stakeholders involved. Strategic and operational planning, conducting a capacity audit or aspects of organisational development are examples of complex problems commonly tackled by consultants.

---

<sup>1</sup> European Union Parliamentary Support Programme, *A Guide to Managing Consultants*  
<http://www.parliament.gov.za/eupsp/consultants/guide/sec2.html>

## II. PLANNING FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

All projects and organisations have plans that describe their activities within the next period, usually between one and five years. Most programme and project managers have thought about when they will need technical assistance to meet specific deliverables. To ensure that deliverables are met, all projects and organisations should **plan in advance for technical assistance**.

A programme or project should have a plan indicating which pieces of work will require technical assistance over the course of the year. This plan will coincide with the overall project deliverables and milestones.

### There are many advantages to pro-active planning for technical assistance.

The advantages are:

1. Assignments can be prioritised
2. Budgets can be planned and allocated to assignments
3. Greater efficiency can be created because of more coherent sequencing of consultant activities
4. The role of consultants can be fully discussed
5. There is greater buy-in from stakeholders and counterparts
6. Procurement processes to secure a consultant are timely
7. More time is available to implement all steps of STTA management
8. General planning can be reinforced by close consideration of what will need consultant inputs and related budgets.

The TA plan is developed for a period of not less than six months and is for more than just one assignment. Prior to the start of any assignment, the following tasks will need to be completed, as reflected in the TA plan:

- ♦ Stakeholders must agree on the role and value of technical assistance to address the specific task that has been identified
- ♦ Money to cover the cost of the assignment must be secured. This may also include securing additional budget to cover contingencies or follow-up arising from the assignment. For example, if the assignment is to develop a new policy, are there resources available to support the introduction of the new policy after the completion of the assignment?
- ♦ Draft Terms of Reference (ToR) must be prepared for comment by stakeholders
- ♦ Finalisation of Terms of Reference and sign-off prior to the selection of the consultant candidate.

**Table 1** below is an example of a completed 6-month TA plan. Note that a minimum of five weeks is available in this plan to select an appropriate candidate for each assignment. You are more likely to secure a high quality consultant if you are well prepared in advance of the assignment start date.

## Table 1

### An example of a completed 6-month TA PLAN

Assignment	Month	Aug				Sep				Oct				Nov				Dec				Jan					
		Week	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	
<b>Strategic &amp; Operational Planning</b>																											
Assignment Concept																											
Buy-in for assignment																											
Budget secured																											
Draft ToR																											
Final ToR																											
Assignment start date																											
<b>M&amp;E Plan</b>																											
Assignment Concept																											
Buy-in for assignment																											
Budget secured																											
Draft ToR																											
Final ToR																											
Assignment start date																											
<b>Database Development</b>																											
Assignment Concept																											
Buy-in for assignment																											
Budget secured																											
Draft ToR																											
Final ToR																											
Assignment start date																											



Technical assistance planning is a new step for many organisations and there may be resistance or uncertainty about its value and feasibility. There are many reasons for this. These reasons can include the absence of an implementation plan into which a technical assistance plan will fit, the expectation that no one will adhere to the plan once it is drawn up, that donor agendas to fund technical assistance may not fit with their partner's agendas, and that there is a lack of buy-in from other stakeholders.

## TSF information box

The TSF Southern Africa has a TA Management Capacity Development Programme that provides support to HIV and AIDS programmes and organisations wanting to plan for technical assistance. A consultant from the TSF Southern Africa can facilitate TA planning for an organisation that is selected onto the programme. For more information about this programme and how to apply, refer to page 33 of this guide.

### III. WRITING TERMS OF REFERENCE

Terms of Reference (ToR) are the basis upon which consultants carry out their assignment and they are essential for an assignment to be effective, as they provide answers to some key questions. These questions include:

- ♦ Why is the assignment necessary?
- ♦ What will the outputs or deliverables be?
- ♦ Who will be involved and with what resources?
- ♦ When and where will the consultancy take place?
- ♦ How is the consultancy expected to achieve the objectives?
- ♦ What is the budget?
- ♦ What are the expected number and level of consultant days required?

The process of developing the ToR is often as important as their content.

This is because it is crucial to establish common ownership with the commitment and agreement of all key stakeholders. This is especially so if the consultant will report to a committee or a reference group with representatives from different sectors or organisations.

The Terms of Reference must be reviewed by the consultant as well as the client. A consultant can help a client make sure that the deliverables are both realistic and achievable. For example, clients may demand a final report within a time period that the consultant knows is unrealistic.

#### TSF information box

The TSF Southern Africa checks all the ToRs by engaging with the client before selecting consultants for an assignment. Many clients have welcomed the constructive feedback offered by the TSF about ToRs. A member of the TSF quality assurance team will ensure that the task described by the ToR is clear and that a realistic number of consultant days are allocated to the task.

The **checklists** below help with the development of ToRs.

**Checklist 1** is a template for a Terms of Reference. Use this template to prepare a ToR you are writing or to review a ToR you have received. The template describes all the areas to be considered in the preparation of a good ToR.

**Checklist 2** provides a template for drawing up a budget for a short-term assignment. A realistic budget is important for a successful assignment. (Note: Not all areas of the checklists are relevant to all assignments.)

# Checklist 1

## A template for the preparation and review of TERMS OF REFERENCE for a short-term assignment

Contract Name:

Reference Number:

Client/Country:

TORs prepared by:

Terms of Reference	Done or N/A
<p><b>Background</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide general context</li><li>• Provide assignment specific information</li><li>• Identify documentation that is relevant to understanding the background information, where appropriate</li></ul>	
<p><b>Purpose &amp; objectives</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• State the overall purpose of the assignment</li><li>• State the specific objectives of the assignment</li></ul>	
<p><b>Scope &amp; tasks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• State the scope of work and where needed describe what is not part of the assignment</li><li>• Describe the methods to be used in the assignment (for example, review of documents or focus group discussions)</li><li>• Describe the specific tasks to be undertaken (for example, a train-the-trainer workshop for 20 participants, mentor 20 trainees, a 3-day strategic planning exercise, etc.)</li></ul>	
<p><b>Deliverables/outputs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Prepare a list of the specific deliverables (for example, an operational plan for the National AIDS Commission from 2007-2009, an evaluation report, a workshop presentation, etc.)</li></ul>	
<p><b>Inputs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Give details about specific counterparts</li><li>• Describe other important stakeholders</li><li>• Describe the role and composition of a project / assignment task team / steering committee, if needed</li></ul>	

### **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
  - any specific details related to availability (for example, must be able to work in Windhoek for 4 weeks)
- Describe the sourcing policy for this assignment (for example, national consultants will be given preference)

### **Time & scheduling**

- State the start and finish date of the assignment
- State whether there is any flexibility in these dates
- State any other important deadlines for interim deliverables (such as, the date when a first draft report is required)

### **Budget**

- A budget stating the number of days of consultant time needed and daily rates
  - Budget for other costs related to the consultant appointment including transport, accommodation, per diem
  - Budget for other items as necessary (for example, workshop costs)
- (Note: You may simply state the expected number of consultant days required in the ToR. However, it is useful to have an idea of the full budget needed to help you plan.)

### **General**

- If the ToRs are still draft then it is important to state this
- State who the consultant/s will reporting to and any other issues related to accountability
- Clearly indicate a deadline for application

## Checklist 2

Template for the development of a BUDGET for a short-term assignment

Professional fees	Days	Rate	Total
Consultant A			
Consultant B			
<b>Sub-total fees</b>			
Travel	No	Rate	
Insurance, Visas, Immunisation			
Daily Lodging Cost			
Per Diem Allowance			
Airfares       - Local flights			
- Regional flights			
Ground Travel - Car hire			
- Taxi			
- Private Vehicle Use			
<b>Sub-total - Travel</b>			
Communications			
Courier / Postage services			
Cell phone			
Other phone / fax			
Internet			
Printing and copying			
<b>Sub-total - Communications + other</b>			
<b>TOTAL COSTS:</b>			
<b>Management Fees</b>			
<b>TOTAL</b>			
<b>VAT</b>			
<b>TOTAL BUDGET</b>			

## STEP 2

# MATCHING the ASSIGNMENT with a consultant



There are two components to this step. These are:

- I. Selecting a consultant
- II. Preparing a contract

### I. SELECTING A CONSULTANT

There are several channels available to organisations and projects when they need to select a consultant. The greatest challenge is finding a consultant who is well qualified to do the work, whose quality of work is of a high standard and who is available to do the work when you need them.

### TSF information box

Clients using the TSF Southern Africa will be able to select candidates from our pool of quality-assured consultants, all of whom have had their references checked and many of whom are personally known to the TSF for their excellent standard of work. Organisations or projects not using the TSF may approach academic staff from a university, make enquiries with known consultants and consultancy groups or use the internet to find consultants.

It is essential when selecting consultants that they are able to meet the requirements of the Terms of Reference.

**Consultants need to have the necessary skills, knowledge, experience and attitudes to fulfill their role.**

Depending on the type of assignment, the expectations may include:

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

Usually the first step is to review a list of CVs. It is important to check that the CV and present work experience, starting with the most relevant and recent, relates to the assignment expectations. It is often difficult to assess a candidate's suitability just from a CV. Where possible, it is best to also interview a candidate either telephonically or face-to-face, and to obtain references.

Adapt **checklist 3** to help you prepare the criteria against which a shortlist of candidates can be selected.



# Checklist 3

## Preparing a list of CRITERIA FOR CONSULTANT SELECTION

### EXAMPLE: Table of criteria for consultant identification

*Adapt and add to the lists below for each case of consultant selection*

Attributes	Essential (E) or Desirable (D)
<p><b>Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitation skills</li> <li>• Report writing</li> <li>• Training skills</li> <li>• Organisational development</li> <li>• Qualitative research skills</li> <li>• Quantitative research skills</li> <li>• Mentoring and coaching skills</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Knowledge and understanding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Background in epidemiology</li> <li>• Background in adult education</li> <li>• Background in health promotion</li> <li>• Background in public health</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Experience and achievements</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 years experience in HIV and AIDS</li> <li>• Experience in mass media campaigns</li> <li>• Experience in programmes supporting orphans and vulnerable children</li> <li>• Experience of working in inter-sectoral teams</li> <li>• Experience of working in multi-disciplinary teams</li> <li>• Experience of working with this country or agency</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Other</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good references from reputable organisations / individuals</li> <li>• Language skills</li> </ul>	

## II. PREPARING A CONTRACT

Any consultant on assignment needs to have a valid contract.

This usually has two components, namely a letter of agreement that sets out the terms and conditions, as well as the terms of reference for the assignment.

### TSF information box

The TSF Southern Africa can prepare all the contracts for an assignment. The TSF can prepare a contract for the client with the TSF and for the consultant with the TSF. In situations where an assignment is not managed through the TSF then usually a contract or a letter of agreement needs to be signed by both the consultant and the contracting organisation. The TSF can help you to enforce contracts and ensure delivery at a later stage.

Any organisation should have a template contract that has been checked by a lawyer. Under normal circumstances, a consultant **should not start any work** on an assignment until his/her contract is agreed to, signed and authorised.

# STEP 3

## MANAGING the ASSIGNMENT



Project and/or programme managers should assume that they will have to be actively involved in consultant assignments in order to ensure their success. Consultancies do not necessarily reduce work for managers and other stakeholders – but good planning of the process from ToR stage through to the active assignment and follow-up will bring about positive change.

This step addresses the role of the person who directly manages an assignment on behalf of the client. In this section, the term “**assignment manager**” is used to describe this role. There are two components to this step:

- I. Preparatory work prior to the consultant arriving on assignment
- II. Monitoring when the consultant is on assignment

### I. 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 doing this preparation has a major influence on the success of an assignment. Although this is work completed by the assignment manager, it is useful for a consultant to be knowledgeable about the preparatory work that needs to be done. This will help a consultant to know what should be done before he / she starts work on an assignment.

Preparatory work for an assignment can be divided into **five activities**. These are:

- ◆ Raising stakeholder awareness about issues the consultancy will address and ensuring their co-operation and support
- ◆ The appointment and briefing of a counterpart
- ◆ The collection of documentation
- ◆ Planning and scheduling assignment activities
- ◆ Making logistical arrangements.

- **Raising stakeholder awareness**

Ideally stakeholders should be involved in the preparation of the ToR for an assignment. Sometimes this is not always possible and may make the process messy and cumbersome. However, it is important to ensure that all stakeholders have a copy of the ToR and are well briefed about the consultant assignment. It is very difficult for a consultant to start work when stakeholders are still unclear about the objectives of the assignment or do not know what a meeting is about. Mobilising stakeholders is especially important if a consultant is expected to report to a reference group constituted by different stakeholders.

- **Appointing and briefing a counterpart**

A key characteristic of effective technical assistance is often the appointment of a client counterpart to work closely with a consultant. This provides an opportunity for capacity development or skills transfer and improved consultancy outcomes, as the counterpart will often understand the objectives and context of the assignment well and will support the carry-through of results once the assignment is complete.

An assignment counterpart is usually the key individual who is directly responsible for the work to be addressed in the assignment. If a consultant is expected to work alongside a counterpart, it is very important that the counterpart is motivated, has a clearly defined role in the assignment tasks and has cleared time to work with the consultant. The role of a counterpart is best described in the ToR, the inception report or the work plan to avoid any misunderstanding between the client and consultant. The time to be spent working together should be clearly identified within the work plans of both parties.

- **Collection of documentation**

It is important to recognise that consultants need adequate time in any assignment to read and reflect on background information. It is the responsibility of the assignment manager to collect relevant documentation prior to the start of an assignment and, where possible, to deliver this to the consultant prior to his/her arrival on assignment. This facilitates consultants working in the field as quickly as possible once on assignment.

## TSF information box

The TSF Southern Africa collects background information and will send out information to consultants undertaking assignments on behalf of the TSF to support a project or assignment manager and to ensure that our consultants are well prepared. Thus the TSF Southern Africa helps to orientate consultants to client contexts and expectations.

The types of background information that may be relevant to consultants on assignment are:

- ◆ HIV and AIDS national plan
- ◆ Studies that describe the progress or nature of the HIV and AIDS epidemic
- ◆ M&E reports.

### ● **Planning and scheduling of assignment activities**

A programme of activities needs to be drawn up by the assignment manager prior to the start of the assignment. This includes meetings and visits which will facilitate the work of the consultant/s in delivering the outputs specified in the ToR. The programme should be detailed and give realistic time allocations to various meetings, background reading, etc. Invitations to workshops should be sent to participants, if necessary. The 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 re-confirmed closer to the start date of the assignment.

### ● **Logistical arrangements**

Good logistical arrangements for a consultant and for the activities involved in the assignment underpin an effective assignment. Logistics include:

- ◆ transport
- ◆ 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 for an individual assignment to ensure that all administrative and logistical arrangements are made in good time. As an assignment manager, you need to review the items on this checklist at regular intervals in advance of the assignment to check that everything is in place. It is also a good idea to check with the consultant 48 hours before the assignment start date that everything is in place and that the consultant is aware of the arrangements and the programme ahead of time.

## TSF information box

The TSF Southern Africa will speak with both the client and the consultant prior to a consultant starting, to check that all the logistical arrangements are in place. The TSF can also offer support with logistical arrangements in a case where a client has limited capacity to do this. The TSF Southern Africa will for some assignments arrange visas, book flights and accommodation and advance expenses to a consultant where needed.

Use **checklist 4** below to help you remember whether you have completed all the activities associated with the preparatory work for an assignment.

The following checklist is provided to assist in managing consultant assignments. This checklist covers all the preparatory work for an assignment prior to a consultant arriving on the job.



# Checklist 4

## MANAGING THE ASSIGNMENT: Preparatory work

### PREPARATORY WORK

Preparatory work	Done or N/A
<p><b>Stakeholder involvement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Key stakeholders briefed about consultancy to enhance co-operation and acceptance</li><li>- Confirm assignment objectives/deliverables with key stakeholders</li><li>- Counterpart identified</li><li>- Counterpart knows roles and responsibilities for assignment and is available for the specified time</li><li>- Develop a work plan for counterpart to ensure efficient role and participation.</li></ul>	
<p><b>Documentation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- All relevant briefing documentation identified and collated</li><li>- Send reading material to consultant</li></ul>	
<p><b>Planning and scheduling assignment activities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Formal timetable developed and meetings, visits, etc. arranged</li><li>- Initial briefing meeting(s) set up with appropriate participants</li><li>- Proposed programme checked with consultant</li><li>- Key meetings re-confirmed closer to the start date of the assignment</li></ul>	
<p><b>Logistics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Confirm and circulate contact details of consultant to stakeholders</li><li>- Arrange flights, visas, health requirements with travel agent</li><li>- Provisionally book hotel</li><li>- Arrange consultant's visas</li><li>- Confirm flights, hotels, local transport arrangements</li><li>- Confirm insurance, if necessary</li><li>- Arrange advances to consultants or hotel, if necessary</li><li>- Send final logistics information and timetable to consultant</li><li>- Check with consultant 48 hours before departure</li><li>- Arrange work space for consultant on arrival</li></ul>	

## II. MONITORING WHEN THE CONSULTANT IS ON ASSIGNMENT

Both the assignment manager and the consultant have a role to play in good assignment management once the assignment starts. The greater responsibility rests with the assignment manager. An experienced consultant will help an assignment manager clarify his or her thinking and ensure that the assignment is realistic, efficient and effective.

Monitoring of an assignment starts when a consultant arrives on assignment and finishes when the assignment is complete. Monitoring has three important activities. The last activity runs until the assignment is complete and therefore includes the management of the final deliverables and the management of the payment schedule. These activities are:

- ◆ Organising a welcome
- ◆ The initial briefing meeting and confirmation of work plan
- ◆ Monitoring and overseeing.

### ● Organising a welcome

Often consultants will be meeting their assignment manager for the first time on arrival. Many assignments require that consultants are met at the airport, bus or train stations. Organising a welcome helps create a good first impression. As part of your welcome, try and make sure that you introduce the consultant to all the key members of the project / programme team as early as possible. Having a work space and infrastructure (e.g. printers, internet access) organised for the consultant will allow them to settle down and become productive more quickly.

### ● The initial briefing meeting and confirmation of work plan

At the initial briefing meeting, it may be desirable to only have the assignment manager and the consultant present without the other stakeholders. This will allow for a frank exchange of ideas about the assignment, the consultant contract, the ToR and the proposed work plan.

At the start of an assignment the ToR must be discussed to confirm that the consultant and client have a common understanding of the assignment, including its objectives and deliverables.

## The ToR are often elaborated or revised in the form of a work plan or inception report.

This allows the assignment manager and the consultant to agree together on issues such as the final schedule of activities, methods, the role of a counterpart, deadlines for deliverables and reporting and accountability. If important changes are needed in the scope of work plan, it is best to confirm these in writing. It may also be important to clarify up-front what will happen if deadlines are not met due to unpredictable circumstances.

Consultants working on short-term contracts may also need to be told by the assignment manager about local practices that will help to build relationships with stakeholders within a short period of time. For example, a consultant may need to know about the level of formality in government ministries and may need to be advised about an appropriate dress code. The assignment manager can decide to organise an informal social event to facilitate people getting to know one another in a short period of time. This can also be useful at the end of an assignment where people may need to debrief informally about the process and the lessons that have come out of the assignment.

Finally, it is necessary to discuss who is responsible for consultant liaison and logistics if this is not completed by the assignment manager.

- **Monitoring and overseeing**

### *Developing trust*

The relationship between the consultant and you, the assignment manager, should be one of mutual respect and trust. Once there is a breakdown of trust, consultancies are at high risk of failure. It is good to set a relationship with the consultant where possible indications that things may be going badly are identified and discussed up-front. These can then be considered in relation to the impact on existing time schedules and the final deliverables. It is also important to give positive feedback to consultants when things are going well.

### ***Monitoring and scope creep***

Once an assignment has started, then the assignment manager has the role of monitoring and of overseeing the assignment. Even when consultants are very experienced, they will benefit from monitoring. Often consultants need active support to make sure that they get the necessary information and co-operation to do their assignment effectively and efficiently.

## **TSF information box**

During an assignment managed through the TSF Southern Africa a member of the TSF quality assurance team will contact both the consultant and the client to check that both parties remain happy with the progress of the assignment. This provides clients and consultants with the opportunity to identify problems and get support to deal with obstacles that may arise.

It is also important at this stage of an assignment to check that there has been no “scope creep”. Scope creep describes the situation when the assignment is starting to address problems not originally included in the ToR for an assignment. The reasons for a scope creep must be discussed with the consultant. Where these are important, the necessary changes to an assignment work plan must be negotiated. When this happens, it usually requires that the number of days allocated to an assignment is re-examined.

### ***Setting deadlines***

Regular follow-up of deadlines and setting schedules for drafts of reports are an important component of monitoring. These deadlines keep consultants focused and ensure good time management. Consultants may lose interest in the assignment if you do not show interest in the deliverables!

An assignment manager must make sure that times are set for regular report-backs to reference groups and to the client.

### ***Quality assurance of the assignment 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 assignment report or output.

## TSF information box

If your assignment has been managed through the TSF Southern Africa, you will get assistance with ensuring the quality of the final assignment reports. A member of the technical assurance team at the TSF Southern Africa will see the final draft of an assignment report prior to its final delivery to you, the client. This person will, where possible, be technically experienced in the area of the assignment and will have extensive consulting experience. The TSF Southern Africa will ensure that reports and other deliverables are well presented and address the requirements of the assignment.

### *Payment*

Timely payment of consultants is part of good management practice. A consultant will be happier to work hard if he/she knows that payment will be made as per the assignment contract.

## TSF information box

The TSF Southern Africa arranges for payment of all consultants contracted through the TSF. It can thus help clients manage issues of non-delivery, and consultants to manage problems of slow payment.

**Checklist 5** on page 29 will help you identify all the responsibilities of monitoring an assignment. This checklist is provided to assist in managing consultant assignments once a consultant has started on the job.

# Checklist 5

## MANAGING THE ASSIGNMENT: MONITORING when consultant is on assignment

MONITORING	Done or N/A
<p><b>Organising a welcome</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Arrange for consultant to be met on arrival and introduced to key team members</li> <li>- Work space and basic infrastructure set up for consultant</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Initial briefing meeting and work planning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Specific ToR issues identified for clarification and finalisation before or at start of consultancy</li> <li>- Clarify any specific issues related to the contract</li> <li>- Specific, written work plan developed and agreed</li> <li>- Clarify issues around time management (for example, which deadlines are critical and which may be flexible)</li> <li>- Clarify issues around conflict of interest, if necessary</li> <li>- Confirm person who will be responsible for liaison and logistics, particularly if the project manager cannot take up the role</li> <li>- Confirm reporting schedule and milestones</li> <li>- Format, uses and target audiences of final outputs clarified</li> <li>- Communications channels, levels of authority and accountability clear to consultant</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Monitoring and overseeing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Regular/appropriate update meetings on progress held</li> <li>- Formal feedback sessions scheduled and attendees confirmed</li> <li>- Adequate time for attendees to read materials, if necessary</li> <li>- Agree schedule for draft report submission</li> <li>- Agree schedule for presentations and report backs</li> <li>- Clear common understanding of payment and claims arrangements</li> <li>- Cost reimbursements made promptly and appropriately</li> <li>- Interim milestone payments made promptly and appropriately</li> <li>- Final payment withheld until deliverable signed off</li> <li>- Final payment made quickly after adequate completion of work</li> </ul>	

## STEP 4

# REVIEWING OUTPUT and the way forward

The follow-up after any assignment should form part of the thinking before the assignment ToR is written.



This planning avoids critical delays that lead to loss of momentum and the reduced effectiveness of the assignment outputs. An assignment should probably not be commissioned if you know that there is no capacity within your programme or organisation to follow through on the likely recommendations and outputs.

An assignment counterpart plays an important role in taking things forward. For example, if an evaluation is being prepared, then an assignment counterpart could convene a task team able to act on the recommendations. If a new framework for monitoring and evaluation has been proposed, then it might be important for an assignment counterpart to organise training for staff tasked with implementing the new framework.

The case study below describes what happened as a result of a TSF assignment to develop a new strategic plan for the Southern Africa Network of AIDS Services Organisations.

### TSF Southern Africa: CASE STUDY SANASO strategic planning

The umbrella organisation, Southern African Network of AIDS Services Organisations (SANASO), was faced with the challenge of redefining its role in the region. The environment and needs had changed, and other strong role players had also begun to take on certain regional roles. The TSF identified a consultant who successfully developed a strategy with SANASO, through working with the organisation and key stakeholders. Key donors have now agreed to fund development in line with this strategy. SANASO will now be restructured and take on a new role in the Southern African region.

The consultant who worked with SANASO has now been asked to work on strategy development with EANASO (East Africa).

In summary, it is very important to plan what activities should take place after the assignment is complete. This may include identifying needs for further consultant support. Sometimes it is helpful to extend the contract of the consultant for a short period to help ensure that the follow-through activities start.

### TSF information box

In some cases the TSF Southern Africa Capacity Development Programme funds up to 2 days of mentoring of client counterparts whilst a consultant is on short term assignment through the TSF. Mentoring supports the process of skills transfer. It also helps ensure that the counterpart has had the opportunity to plan for what will happen next once the consultant has left.

## LEARNING FROM TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

It is important to reflect on an assignment once it is complete. Both the assignment manager and the consultant can review the process and outputs of the assignment and identify important strengths and weaknesses of how it was conducted. Any learning needs to be considered in the planning for your next assignment.

### TSF information box

The TSF Southern Africa provides feedback forms to both clients and consultants. This information is reviewed at regular meetings of the TSF and used to facilitate continuous quality improvement. We ask clients and consultants to consider all aspects of the management of assignments so that for the future we understand which aspects of assignment management clients need most support with.

A client could also ask for additional support by enrolling on the TA Management Capacity Development Programme.

A review of technical assistance in a Kenyan project found that clients had the following reflections to make on the selection of consultants for technical assistance:

- ♦ **Technical expertise** of consultants is a basic requirement
- ♦ **General consulting and process related skills** are often more critical determinants of outcomes than technical skills
- ♦ **Consultants' flexibility** to adapt their methods and approaches to new circumstances and needs is extremely important
- ♦ Increasing the **use of local consultants** can improve results. They are often better orientated to local realities, and well placed to give follow-up support. Bias to using international consultants has been a criticism of many TA programmes.
- ♦ **Appropriate mixes of skills and personalities on teams** may be critical. If people previously have worked well together this may be a valid reason to select them.
- ♦ **Client skills and preferences** may be important. For example, "political" issues may make consultants inappropriate. Or it may be important to avoid large gaps between the skills of consultant and counterparts, if big differences make it likely that counterparts will not be able to use consultancy outputs.



<sup>1</sup> Kinghorn, A. and Muriithi G. Dec 2006 Short Term Technical Assistance for HIV and AIDS Programmes A Good Practice Guide (Kenya HAPAC3: Lesson Learning From The Experience of Large Scale Technical Assistance.) p12

# Capacity Development Services of the TSF Southern Africa

In addition to this publication, the TSF offers **three direct services** to individuals and organisations using consultants to scale up the response to the HIV and AIDS epidemic. Our services assist individuals and organisations to manage consultants for success.

## 1. A facilitated learning programme

This programme is for **organisations** that would like to manage consultants for success. It involves all the individuals within your organisation who manage consultants. Your organisation reviews what is working well within the organisation and how to learn from each other. Your organisation is then supported by TSF facilitators to manage all stages of an assignment and given the opportunity to capture this learning in a guideline that is then used to support your future management of consultants.

The facilitated learning programme usually involves a **two day start-up workshop**, followed up **four half days** for a core team tasked with leading the process. However this programme can also be tailored to meet the specific needs of your organisation.

## 2. Pre-scoping and preparation of Terms of Reference

Assignments can be complex and difficult to plan. The TSF provides facilitators who are able to support organisations in the conceptualisation or pre-scoping and preparation of Terms of Reference. Your organisation can ask the TSF for up to **three days of support** for the pre-scoping and preparation of the Terms of Reference for a complex assignment.

## 3. Skills training

The TSF offers two short skills programmes for individuals who write Terms of Reference and who manage consultants. Both courses are highly participative and participants share experiences and learn through group exercises, role play and case studies. Our courses are:

- ◆ **The Conceptualisation and Preparation of Terms of Reference** (2 or 3 days)
- ◆ **Managing Consultants** (2 or 3 days)

These skills programmes are run on request across the Region for a minimum of 10 and maximum of 20 participants.

## HOW are the TSF Capacity Development Services funded?

The TSF is in a position to fully fund capacity development activities for some organisations directly targeted by the programme.

In other cases the TSF capacity development programme may only partially fund activities. Should the TSF Capacity Development Programme be unable to fund your request for support then we may be able to support your application to other funding sources.

Organisations participating in the facilitated learning programme are required to fund workshop costs including venue and refreshments and participants travel where needed.

## HOW do I contact the TSF capacity development programme?

If you are interested in any of the TSF capacity development services then please send an email to [info@tsfsouthernafrica.com](mailto:info@tsfsouthernafrica.com) telling us about what support you would like to get from the TSF.

A member of the TSF capacity development team will be in touch with you to discuss your request.

Alternatively you can phone us on Tel +27 11 484 8217 or visit our website at [www.tsfsouthernafrica.com](http://www.tsfsouthernafrica.com)

# TSF Southern Africa News Service

The TSF Southern Africa provides a regular news service to consultants registered on our database and to country partners and clients interested to know more about the TSF.

Our short, informative newsflashes provide an update on developments in the TSF Southern Africa and disseminate important information relevant to the HIV and AIDS consulting environment. The purpose of this service is:

- ◆ To keep our consultants, clients and country partners updated about developments in the TSF Southern Africa
- ◆ To publicise important developments in the HIV and AIDS consulting environment across the region
- ◆ To discuss important HIV and AIDS topics relevant across the region
- ◆ To disseminate significant HIV and AIDS information across the region.

Many of our newsflashes are prepared by highly experienced consultants working in one of the TSF technical areas, who will share insights and opinion about developments in the field. The TSF Newsflash is usually sent out twice each month. You can receive the TSF News Service by emailing us at: [info@tsfsouthernafrica.com](mailto:info@tsfsouthernafrica.com)







## To contact the TSF Southern Africa

Send an email to  
[info@tsfsouthernafrica.com](mailto:info@tsfsouthernafrica.com)

Alternatively you can phone us on  
Tel +27 11 484 8217 or visit our website at  
[www.tsfsouthernafrica.com](http://www.tsfsouthernafrica.com)

