



A guide for consultants to
**Short-Term
Technical Assistance**
for HIV and AIDS
programmes





Acknowledgements

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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

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 Co-ordinators. 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 consultants who are 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 you on short-term assignments for HIV and AIDS programmes. It 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 impede the scale-up of HIV and AIDS programmes in the region.

This guide complements a guide written for organisations and projects (or clients) requesting technical assistance. The guide introduces consultants to four steps of effective technical assistance or assignment management, the role of a consultant in assignment management and gives some guidance about important consulting skills.

WHAT can I find in this GUIDE?

In this guide you will find information about:

- The four steps to effective technical assistance management
- Checklists for a consultant 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 supports consultants
- A selection of case studies describing common problems faced by consultants when on assignment.

MANAGING Short-Term Technical Assistance

Effective technical assistance leads to positive changes and action. Information on managing assignments is crucial to make sure that problems associated with short-term consultancies are avoided so that organisations obtain the maximum return on their investment in technical assistance. Problems are experienced both with the client who is requesting technical support and with consultants when they have insufficient technical experience and / or consulting skills.

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

- ◆ Unclear terms of reference (ToR)
- ◆ Unrealistic expectations
- ◆ Poor assignment preparation of stakeholders and counterparts by a client prior to the arrival of the consultant
- ◆ Poorly defined objectives and work plans
- ◆ Inefficient assignment tracking and monitoring.

Other common problems are:

- ◆ An inappropriate match of the technical expertise of the consultant with the needs of the assignment
- ◆ Inadequate process, facilitation or interpersonal skills of the consultant.

These problems often undermine the objectives of the project which can be costly in terms of time, money and outcomes. Since these problems are common, they also contribute to a perception that technical assistance often fails. This of course contributes to a more difficult business environment for consultants.

STEPS to effective TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

There are four main steps to effective management of short-term technical assistance (STTA). Consultants need to ensure that they are familiar with the four steps even though they are not directly responsible for assignment management. This is because a good consultant contributes significantly to effective assignment management by supporting his or her client through the process.

The four steps are:

STEP 1: Preparing for STTA

STEP 2: Matching the assignment with a consultant

STEP 3: Managing the assignment

STEP 4: 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.

STEP 1

PREPARING for Technical Assistance

This step has three components. These are:

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

Consultants should try to get a good idea of which of these components have been addressed well enough. Where they have not, consultants may need to manage resulting risks or unclear issues.

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. 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 or she arrives on assignment. Sometimes it will result in the hiring of a mismatched team; or lead to difficulties of poor stakeholder ownership.

It is thus important for an organisation or project to clearly define why they need technical assistance and whether it should be a short or long consultancy.

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, for example, one addressing HIV and AIDS treatment protocols, counselling skills or training in aspects of project management
- ◆ Evaluate the impact of a service, for example, sites for voluntary HIV testing and 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 changes will be embraced by the organisation or project.

More complex problems involve the 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.

II. PLANNING FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

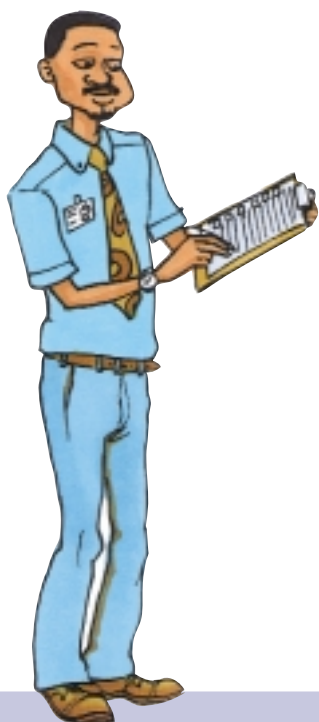
Most projects and organisations have plans that describe their activities within the next period, usually between one and five years. Most programme and project managers have thought about when they will need technical assistance to meet specific deliverables. To ensure that objectives are met, all projects and organisations should usually **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 next six months to one year. This plan will coincide with the overall project deliverables and milestones.

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

These advantages are not only for the organisation or project requesting technical assistance, but are also advantages for consultants. These 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 can be greater buy-in from stakeholders and counterparts
6. Procurement processes to secure a consultant are timely and efficient
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.



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, or the expectation that no one will adhere to the plan once it is drawn up. Others may be that donor agendas to fund technical assistance may not fit with their partner's agendas, and that there will be a lack of buy-in from other stakeholders. Where possible, **a consultant can encourage his or her client to pro-actively plan for TA.**

III. WRITING TERMS OF REFERENCE

Terms of Reference (ToR) are the basis upon which consultants carry out their assignment. 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 (background information)?
- ♦ 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 length of the assignment?
- ♦ What is the budget?
- ♦ What consultant skills are needed?
- ♦ What are the expected number and level of consultant days required?

The ToR is the basis by which the consultant decides whether or not to put him or herself forward for consideration to do the assignment.

For the organisation or project requesting technical assistance, the process of developing the ToR is often as important as the 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 critically 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. For clients, it is helpful to be able to take the advice of an experienced consultant.

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 try to ensure that the task described by the ToR is clear and that a realistic number of consultant days are allocated to the task. Once the ToR is sent to a consultant, the TSF Southern Africa welcomes constructive feedback from the consultant to help further clarify and ensure the success of the assignment.

As a consultant, it is important that you know how to review a ToR. The checklists below will help with the review of a ToR.

Checklist 1 is used to review a Terms of Reference. The checklist includes all the areas to be covered in the preparation of a good ToR. As you read the ToR, use this checklist to tick or mark off all the areas that should be covered.

Checklist 2 provides a template for drawing up a budget for a short-term assignment. This template may help you review the budget associated with the assignment. However, it is important to note that not all assignments will have budgets that match this template. A realistic budget is important for a successful assignment.

Checklist 1

A template for the REVIEW of TERMS OF REFERENCE

Contract Name:

Reference Number:

Draft / Final

Client/Country:

Date:

Terms of Reference

Done or N/A

Background

- Provides general context
- Provides assignment specific information
- Identifies documentation that is relevant to understanding the background information, where appropriate

Purpose & objectives

- States the overall purpose of the assignment
- States the specific objectives of the assignment

Scope & tasks

- States the scope of work and that it is realistic, focused and prioritised
- Where needed, describes what is not part of the assignment
- Describes the methods to be used in the assignment (for example, review of documents or focus group discussions)
- Describes the specific tasks to be undertaken (for example, a train-the-trainer workshop for 20 participants, a 3-day strategic planning exercise, etc.)

Deliverables/outputs

- Has 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.)

Inputs

- Gives details about specific counterparts
- Describes other important stakeholders
- Describes the role and composition of a project / assignment task team / steering committee, if needed

TA selection criteria

- Lists the skills and experience of the consultant/s needed for the assignment.
Includes:
 - qualifications
 - technical skills
 - number of years of relevant work experience
 - a description of the seniority of consultant(s) needed
 - language skills
 - any specific details related to availability (for example, must be able to work in Windhoek for 4 weeks)

Time & scheduling

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

Budget

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

General

- States who the consultant/s will reporting to and any other issues related to accountability
- Clearly indicates 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			
Sub-total fees			
Travel	No	Rate	
Insurance, Visas, Immunisation			
Daily Lodging			
Per Diem Allowance			
Airfares - Local flights			
- Regional flights			
Ground Travel - Car hire			
- Taxi			
- Private Vehicle Use			
Sub-total - Travel			
Communications			
Courier/ Postage services			
Cell phone			
Other phone/ fax			
Internet			
Printing and copying			
Other			
Sub-total - Communications + other			
TOTAL COSTS:			
Management Fees			
TOTAL			
VAT			
TOTAL BUDGET			

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. Their 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 when the consultancy is needed.

Organisations and projects requesting a consultant usually review a set of CVs (curriculum vitae) to select a consultant. It is important that you always have an updated CV that tells potential clients about your assignment experience and reflects your skills areas. Your CV should also include details of a mix of referees who can vouch for your work experience and who are in a position to comment on the standard of your most recent assignment.

The TSF provides all our consultants with a CV template that we encourage consultants registering on the TSF database to complete. **Checklist 3** below is the skills / experience matrix used by consultants to indicate their areas of capability and is found on the TSF CV template. Use this checklist to identify your technical strengths and areas for future development.

The completed skills / experience matrix is also used by the TSF Southern Africa Capacity Development Programme to plan the capacity development programme. For more information about how consultants can benefit from the TSF Capacity Development Programme, refer to page 38 of this booklet.

Checklist 3

CONSULTANT TECHNICAL SKILLS / EXPERIENCE MATRIX

Please insert X in relevant space. If no experience, leave space blank.

Key: 4 = core skill and consulting experience in this area; 3 = core skill area but limited or no consulting in this area; 2 = some experience in this area; 1 = limited training and / or experience

Technical Area	1	2	3	4
<p>Monitoring and Evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M&E Framework and system development • Survey design and implementation • Database design, and IT support • Project and programme evaluation and / or review • Behavioural and biological surveillance 				
<p>Resource tracking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National level and donor • NGO and other 				
<p>Operational and Strategic Planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic planning – national / high level • Strategic planning - organisations • Operational / implementation planning • Decentralised planning • Proposal writing 				
<p>Costing and Budgeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National or sub-national plans • Project costing • Economic evaluations 				
<p>Management (incl. financial)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project management • Management training • HR planning, management and development • Logistics and supply chain, procurement • Financial management • Decentralised / district management 				

Technical Area	1	2	3	4
<p>Partnership Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donor co-ordination • Public Private partnerships • CSO strengthening 				
<p>Organisational Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional appraisal • Structure and systems development • Change management • Leadership development • Other (<i>please state</i>) 				
<p>Gender</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mainstreaming • Gender and HIV/AIDS 				
<p>HIV Technical Areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VCT • PMTCT • ARV programmes • Home Based Care • Communication • OVC • BCC 				
<p>Mainstreaming of HIV and AIDS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Poverty strategies • In Sectors • Development plans 				

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.

It is essential when organisations and projects are selecting consultants that the consultants are able to meet the requirements of the Terms of Reference. For consultants, the challenge is to judge what assignments to put themselves forward for and when to recognise their own inexperience or unavailability.

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

Consultants are generally more likely to get ongoing work if they can be trusted to say what their capabilities and their limitations are. This may make them open to suggestions for teaming up with others to achieve outcomes. In particular, process / facilitation and interpersonal skills are ranked very highly by clients. It is important to consider these as well as your technical abilities when putting yourself forward for an assignment. Some assignments require that a consultant has very strong process skills, especially when working in a multi-stakeholder environment.

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

- ◆ Relevant technical expertise and qualifications
- ◆ Relevant experience
- ◆ A demonstrated sensitivity for 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
- ◆ Experience of making practical and feasible recommendations to clients
- ◆ Ability to meet deadlines.

A consultant needs to be effective in all of the above areas. However, all of these areas are improved through experience and a willingness to learn new skills. As a consultant, you should be willing to invest time to upgrade your skills both in your technical area and in any aspect of consulting skills.

Common shortcomings of consultants as reported to the TSF SA in its initial needs analysis included:

- ♦ Telling, rather than listening
- ♦ Misinterpretation of ToR
- ♦ Good proposals but inability to deliver on them.



It is often difficult for an organisation or project to assess a candidate's suitability just from a CV and, where possible, a consultant should expect to be interviewed either telephonically or face-to-face, and to obtain references.

You also need to consider for yourself whether you have the necessary qualities for a particular assignment. You may compromise your reputation for good work by putting yourself forward for an assignment that is beyond your current skill set.

Examples of ways to enhance your competencies may include:

- ♦ Working in teams with more experienced consultants for more exposure
- ♦ Asking respected clients or colleagues for debrief sessions to get frank feedback
- ♦ Sending clients short questionnaires after completing an assignment to gauge your performance
- ♦ Asking the TSF for feedback after the completion of an assignment.

A review of technical assistance in a Kenyan project¹ 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.

Checklist 4 is a description of important competencies needed by a consultant. Consider your own behaviour against each of these competencies. Put a tick or a comment next to any of the competencies you feel you need to develop further. Consider whether there are ways that you could do this within your own current environment.

¹ 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

Checklist 4

COMPETENCY CHECKLIST FOR A CONSULTANT

Competency	Effective behaviour	Less effective behaviour	My comments about my own behaviour
Enthusiasm, energy, resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive attitude Enthusiastic Invests real effort Handles failure positively Shows tenacity to pursue ideas Approaches projects constructively Uses humour to help calm tense situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No sense of urgency May leave out difficult issues Cynical about development Very serious and intense Anxious under pressure Defensive if challenged Volatile or withdraws in discussions 	
Ability to adapt and manage change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not bothered when tasks change Co-operative Handles multiple tasks or problems Looks for better ways to do things Handles ambiguity and sets clear direction Willing to try new ways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resistant to adapting to changes in environment Relies on replicating past experience Prefers to work on one project at a time Emphasises problems rather than solutions 	
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarifies information Written work is easy to understand Structures information in clear and concise manner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Long winded Too complex Unable to put point across 	
Influencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Projects confidence and authority Has a range of skills from gentle persuasion to assertive Upholds position when challenged Facilitates agreements in a group; acts as a link 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May focus on short term at expense of long term Submissive in approach Quiet and non-contributing Arrogant, blunt Lectures people Tells people rather than persuading people Talks too much 	

Competency	Effective behaviour	Less effective behaviour	My comments about my own behaviour
Analytical skills	Quickly identifies the key issue Knows what is feasible and acceptable Sees opportunities rather than constraints Synthesises information accurately Identifies options	Gets stuck in the analysis Hide behind jargon and sophisticated language Solutions are partial or favour one particular outcome Unable to make linkages	
Innovation	Imaginative/creative Builds on other ideas Thinks out of the box	Offers tried and tested conventional solutions	
Judgement and decision making	Thinks through the risks; evaluates impact on others Involves others in decision making process Prepares options to consider	Lacks understanding of process Bases decisions on ill informed ideas without considering impact on others Bases decisions on ideas of others	
Planning and organising	Prioritises work Manages own time Self reliant Needs minimal supervision Has self awareness of effect on others	Misses deadlines Gets distracted from main job by other less important tasks	
Strategic perspective	Understands relationships between stakeholders/ partners e.g. government, donors Grasps political and economic environment Develops vision, targets in strategic context	Technical result prioritised above more holistic result Narrow view of own role Narrow view of development Sees problems in absolutes	

Competency	Effective behaviour	Less effective behaviour	My comments about my own behaviour
Team working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishes rapport Socially confident Refers issues to other team members Considers other views Tolerant of other styles of being and work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quiet, withdrawn in a team Does not include others in team Prefers to have control of output from team 	
Facilitation and managing a team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Able to manage other team members Clarifies objectives and roles Encourage all to contribute Has a range of styles to manage the team Recognises and manages conflict positively Organises the work of the team Delegates to others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drives own priorities at expense of team Allows some team members to dominate or not to participate Tells the team what to think Blames others when things go wrong Makes decisions on behalf of team Tries to lead the team all the time 	
Behavioural approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Sensitive to cultural issues:</i> Tries to fit in Recognises cultural signals Involves others <i>Sensitive to political context:</i> Sets parameters for working Maintains impartiality Identifies issues that are open to misinterpretation Knows when suitable to stay quiet <i>Empathy with people:</i> Sympathetic to others values Tolerant Courteous Able to communicate at all levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lacks appreciation of local culture Causes offence Takes a certain view – not impartial Patronising Talks too much 	

II. PREPARING A CONTRACT

Any consultant on assignment needs to have a valid contract.

The contract usually has two components:

- an agreement that sets out the terms and conditions, and
- the Terms of Reference for the assignment.

The contract should protect the client against the non-performance of the consultant; and should protect the consultant against unreasonable expectations from the client.

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.

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

STEP 3

MANAGING the ASSIGNMENT

An assignment is always more successful when the project and / or programme manager understands how to manage the assignment for 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. Similarly, active input from a consultant can facilitate an effective and successful assignment.

This step discusses the role of the person who directly manages an assignment on behalf of the client and how a consultant can contribute to this success. In this section the term “**assignment manager**” is used to describe this role.

There are two components to this step. These are:

- I. Preparatory work prior to the consultant arriving on assignment
- II. Planning and monitoring during the 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 also useful for a consultant to be knowledgeable about the preparatory work that needs to be done. This will help you to ask the right questions before starting work on an assignment and to think about the task ahead.

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 Terms of Reference for an assignment. Sometimes this is not always possible and may make the process too cumbersome. However, it is important to ensure that all stakeholders have a copy of the ToR and are briefed well about the consultant assignment. The consultant may wish to help to develop the briefing letter.

Where possible, consultants should check with the client that all the stakeholders have been briefed about the assignment and are aware of the work the consultant is about to commence. Consultants may also want to clarify comments and queries from stakeholders on the assignment before more detailed work begins. It is very difficult for a consultant to start work when stakeholders are still unclear about the objectives of the assignment. Mobilising stakeholders is especially important if you are 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 who will work closely with a consultant. This provides an opportunity for capacity development or skills transfer and improved consultancy outcomes: 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.

Developing a productive working relationship with your client counterpart is a key task for a consultant.

If you will be working 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 you. The role of a counterpart is best described in the ToR or in the inception report or 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. Your initial meeting with your assignment manager is a good time to talk about the expectations you may have of an assignment counterpart.

- **Collection of documentation**

As a consultant, it is important to ensure that you have 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 you prior to your arrival on assignment. This will facilitate your working in the field as quickly as possible once on assignment. In some cases, it may of course be important that you also contribute to background information collection.

TSF information box

The TSF Southern Africa collects background information and makes information available 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 can help to orientate consultants to client contexts and expectations.

The types of background information that may be relevant to a consultant on assignment and which you should ensure that you have seen are:

- ♦ National HIV and AIDS plan
- ♦ Epidemiological surveys and updates
- ♦ Studies that describe the progress or nature of the HIV and AIDS epidemic
- ♦ Specific programme or project plans and other documents
- ♦ M&E reports.

- **Planning and scheduling of assignment activities**

A programme of activities should be drawn up by the assignment manager prior to the start of the assignment. This includes meetings and visits which will facilitate your work 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. You and the assignment manager should discuss the programme either prior to the start of the assignment or at your first meeting together.

• Logistical arrangements

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

- ♦ visas
- ♦ transport
- ♦ accommodation
- ♦ a workspace for the consultant during the assignment
- ♦ communication such as access to the internet and / or telephone
- ♦ booking meeting or training venues
- ♦ availability of audio-visual and other equipment.

An assignment manager should have a checklist for an individual assignment to ensure that all administrative and logistical arrangements are made in good time.

Check that your assignment manager reviews the items on this checklist at regular intervals in advance of the assignment to make sure that everything is in place.

However, it also helps an assignment manager if a consultant thinks ahead about what they are likely to need. A good assignment manager will check with you, the consultant, before the assignment start date that everything is in place and that you are aware of the arrangements and the programme ahead.



As a consultant, there are things that you need to think about if your assignment is away from home. Firstly, if you are working in a foreign country for the first time it will be helpful to make time to read background information about the country.

Secondly, find out early whether you need a visa and make arrangements to get one, if needed. You also may need to **check about specific health concerns** and get advice about vaccinations and malaria, or other precautions you need to take. A travel clinic or general practitioner will be able to assist you with this.

Thirdly, you need to **ensure that you have travel insurance** to cover your trip. The TSF Southern Africa does not routinely provide consultants with travel or other insurance.

TSF information box

The TSF Southern Africa can check 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 or consultant 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.

The TSF Southern Africa can assist consultants to get some background information about the fourteen countries in our region when they are going into a country for the first time.

Use **checklist 5** below to help you check whether all the activities associated with preparatory work for an assignment have been considered by a client.

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 5

Managing the assignment: Preparatory work

PREPARATORY WORK

Preparatory work	Done or N/A
<p>Stakeholder involvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Key stakeholders briefed about consultancy to enhance co-operation and acceptance- Confirm assignment objectives / deliverables with key stakeholders- Counterpart identified- Counterpart knows roles and responsibilities for assignment and is available for the specified time- Develop a work plan for counterpart to ensure efficient role and participation.	
<p>Documentation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- All relevant briefing documentation identified and collated- Sent reading material to consultant	
<p>Planning and scheduling assignment activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- 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	
<p>Logistics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Confirm contact details of counterparts- Arrange flights, visa, health requirements with travel agent- Provisionally book hotel- Arrange consultant's visas- Confirm flights, hotels, local transport arrangements- Confirm insurance- Arrange advances to hotel, if necessary- Send final logistics information and timetable to consultant- Confirm arrangements with consultant before departure- Arrange work space	

II. PLANNING AND MONITORING DURING THE ASSIGNMENT

Both the assignment manager and the consultant have a role to play in good assignment management once the assignment starts. The formal responsibility rests with the assignment manager. But an experienced consultant will help assignment managers clarify their thinking and ensure that the assignment is realistic, efficient and effective.

The component “Planning and monitoring of an assignment” starts when you arrive on assignment and finishes when the assignment is complete. It 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:

- ♦ Meeting key counterparts and setting up for work
- ♦ The initial briefing meeting and confirmation of work plan
- ♦ Monitoring and overseeing.

● Meeting key counterparts and setting up for work

A good assignment manager will ensure that you are properly welcomed and will introduce you to all the key members of the project / programme team as early as possible. If you need a work space and infrastructure (e.g. printers, internet access) make sure that your assignment manager is aware of this. For many assignments it is important to make courtesy calls to key leadership, such as permanent secretaries, to ensure their support and input.

● The initial briefing meeting and confirmation of work plan

The initial briefing meetings with your assignment manager and other key role players are very important to start your assignment. Initially, it may be desirable to only have the assignment manager and yourself present without the other stakeholders. This will allow for a frank exchange of ideas about the assignment, your contract, the ToR and the proposed work plan. It will also be important to meet with the steering committee, reference group or other role players. Make sure that there is agreement on who you are primarily responsible to.

At the start of an assignment, the ToR must be discussed to confirm that you and the 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 you 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, budget or work plan, it is best to confirm these in writing. It may also be important to clarify up-front what will happen if deadlines or the scope of work cannot be met due to unpredictable circumstances.

Consultants working on short-term contracts may also benefit from discussing with the assignment manager **local practices that will help to build relationships** with stakeholders within a short period of time. For example, you may need to know about the level of formality in government ministries and may need to be advised about **an appropriate dress code**.

TSF information box

The TSF Southern Africa will deal directly with all contracting issues with consultants when assignments are managed through the TSF.

Finally, it is important to find out who is responsible for consultant liaison and logistics if this is not done by the assignment manager him or herself. Sometimes a project administrator will oversee logistics rather than the assignment manager. Make sure you know who to contact in the event of there being any difficulties.

- **Monitoring and overseeing**

Developing trust

The relationship between the client and you, the consultant, should be one of mutual respect and trust. Clients rate the interpersonal and communication skills of consultants very highly and it is important that you are a skilled facilitator and good listener. Once there is a breakdown of trust, consultancies are at high risk of failure. It is good to set a relationship with the client so that where things are going badly, they 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 clients when things are going well.

A regular debriefing (for example, weekly at the end of visits) where you update the client on progress and problems can be a useful tool for taking stock and ensuring that expectations are aligned.

Monitoring and scope creep

Once an assignment has started, the assignment manager has the role of monitoring and overseeing the assignment. Even when you are a very experienced consultant you will benefit from being monitored. Often consultants need active support to make sure that they get the necessary information and co-operation to do their assignment effectively and efficiently. In the event of an assignment manager being slow at setting up report back meetings, then take the initiative to do this by suggesting a date and time to meet. A schedule of regular meetings will help ensure that the communication is good between you and that unpleasant surprises do not arise at the end of the assignment.

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 will assist clients and consultants to manage assignments for optimum outcomes.

It is also important to check that there has been no “scope creep”. Scope creep occurs when the assignment starts to include issues and activities not originally included in the ToR for the assignment. The reasons for the scope creep must be discussed with the client. Where these additional requirements are important, the necessary changes to the assignment work plan must be negotiated. When this happens, it almost always requires that the number of days and budget allocated to an assignment is re-examined.

Setting deadlines

Regular follow-up of deadlines and the setting of schedules for drafts of reports are important components of monitoring. These deadlines keep consultants and clients focused and ensure good time management.

An important of aspect of being a good consultant is meeting deadlines.

An assignment manager will help set these deadlines, but you need to state whether the deadlines are realistic. This skill comes with experience but the key to success is setting achievable targets for report writing or for the preparation of a presentation and communicating regularly with the client about your progress.

Prior to the presentation of your work to your client, it is important to check that your work is well presented. Identify the target audience and intended use of various reports. Then agree on the appropriate nature (Powerpoint presentation, text, etc.) and length of reports to maximise impact and avoid wasted effort.

When you are allocating time to complete your report or presentation, make sure that you include enough time to check the formatting and other issues related to general presentation. Sometimes consultants let themselves down by presenting an interesting report, but one that has no contents page, no proper cover page, no clear summary or is badly structured. Make sure that you know someone who can help you format documents, help you edit reports where needed and/or assist with Powerpoint presentations.

An assignment manager should make sure that times are set for regular report backs to reference groups and to the client. In the event that this is not planned for, then it is important that you encourage the assignment manager to set up these opportunities for feedback. Most difficulties that arise in assignments can be tackled through a programme of regular report backs. Avoid raising controversial or difficult issues for the first time in the final assignment report!

TSF information box

The TSF Southern Africa has TSF report templates available to consultants on TSF assignments. This helps ensure that all final deliverables are well presented.

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. As the consultant, make sure the sign off of your work is properly obtained.

TSF information box

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

Payment

Timely payment to consultants according to the assignment contract is part of good management practice. However, make sure that you submit your invoices and expense claims accurately and in good time. Errors and delays will make you look less professional. In the event of a client not paying on time, then it sometimes helps to have an administrator to chase your payment rather than to do this yourself. This allows you to keep a more cordial relationship with your client and assignment manager!

TSF information box

The TSF Southern Africa arranges for payment of all consultants contracted through the TSF. It does this by invoicing the client first. However, after a set period, it will try to pay the consultant even if the money has not been received from the client, provided that the deliverable was of an accepted standard.

STEP 4

REVIEWING OUTPUT and implications for 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 reduced effectiveness of the assignment outputs. An assignment should not be commissioned if there is no capacity within a programme or organisation to follow through on the likely recommendations and outputs. This is something that consultants have no control over, but may become aware of serious capacity issues facing organisations and programmes once on assignment.



Sometimes in technical areas where you are experienced, it can help to raise important questions about the long term plans of an organisation or project when considering the ToR. Alternatively, you may decide during or at the end of your assignment to make time with your client to talk about your concerns.

An assignment counterpart is usually very important in relation to 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 or tool has been proposed then it might be important for an assignment counterpart to organise training for staff tasked with implementing the new framework or tool. 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 was then asked to support strategy implementation until key changes were successfully in place.

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

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 any important strengths and weaknesses of how it was conducted. Any lessons learned should be considered in planning for your future assignments.

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 can understand which aspects of assignment management clients need most support with.

TSF Southern Africa

TA Professional Development Programme for Consultants

The TSF Southern Africa is committed to building a pool of high-level consultants, representative of the whole region and of Southern Africa origin. In addition to recruiting consultants across the region, the TSF Southern Africa is implementing a Professional Development Programme for Consultants of Southern Africa origin. The programme targets mature consultants with some experience in the technical areas of the TSF. The programme offers consultants the opportunity to gain further experience so that they are in a position to service requests for HIV and AIDS programme scale-up.

What makes a consultant effective?

The TSF Southern Africa works with many clients across the Southern Africa Region who manage and co-ordinate HIV and AIDS programmes. They tell us what type of consultant offers the best services. Clients want consultants who are technically competent with first rate interpersonal and facilitation skills.

What professional development services does the TSF offer Regional consultants?

In addition to this publication the TSF offers three professional development services to Regional consultants in “hard” technical areas and in “soft” process skills. Often it is the soft skills that present the greatest challenge for those who are schooled in technical areas.

1. Technical development opportunities for Regional consultants

The TSF has a regular programme of technical workshops. We run workshops in M&E, strategic and operational planning and costing. We also have technical Resource Packs for consultants in these areas. Resource packs are available to anyone wanting to use them.

To find out about our technical workshops and to use our technical Resource Packs visit our website www.tsfsouthernafrica.com

2. Process skills for Regional consultants

The TSF offers opportunities for consultants to gain more process skills. We run workshops in coaching and mentoring and system, organisation and development change and facilitation.

To find out about our process workshops visit our website www.tsfsouthernafrica.com

3. On-the-job learning

The TSF is committed to providing learning opportunities through assignments. Where possible the TSF provides a technical mentor to a less experienced consultant working on a TSF assignment. The TSF also provides opportunities for a consultant to shadow another consultant when the task provides a good learning opportunity. For example many consultants have been involved with planning exercises for local organisations but may not have had the opportunity to contribute to planning the national HIV and AIDS response.

How do I contact the TSF capacity development programme?

If you are interested in any of the TSF professional development services then please send an email to 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

How to apply to be registered on the TSF Southern Africa Database of Consultants

If you would like your CV to be considered by the TSF Southern Africa, then it is essential that you have a minimum of five years experience in one of the technical areas of the TSF outlined on pages 16 and 17 of this booklet. You should also have some HIV and AIDS consulting experience. If you have the relevant background then please forward your CV to info@tsfsouthernafrika.com. You also need to send the names and address of three referees. All our consultants are reference checked and will not be sent on any TSF assignment until this process is complete.

How are the TSF Professional Development Services funded?

The TSF is in a position to fully fund professional development activities for some consultants selected to participate.

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.

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 contacting us at info@tsfsouthernafrika.com



To contact the TSF Southern Africa

Send an email to
info@tsfsouthernafrica.com

Alternatively you can phone us on
Tel +27 11 484 8217 or visit our website at
www.tsfsouthernafrica.com

