MONITORING & EVALUATION

Short Cuts

Guidelines for Getting the Most from Your Technical Assistance

Capacity-Building Guidance

September 2008

Introduction

This *Short Cut* provides guidance on the planning, evaluation, documentation, and follow up of the delivery of capacity-building technical assistance. This tool is applicable to all sectors (e.g., agriculture, health, and food aid), all themes (e.g., global solidarity and peacebuilding), and all functions (e.g., monitoring and evaluation and finance). Capacity building can take many forms, from improving an organization's information technology and equipment, and growing its membership, to increasing its fundraising ability. Most commonly, capacity building means building staff skills through training, workshops, and seminars. It may also include on-the-job training, another powerful capacity-building tool. Capacity-building technical assistance can be provided by advisors from organizational headquarters, regional offices, country programs, local partners, or communities; by partner staff to their peers; and by outside consultants contracted at any level.

4 Steps to Capacity-Building Guidance

Step 1
Prepare a scope of work for the capacity-building technical assistance

Step 2
Evaluate the technical assistance

Step 3
Write the technical assistance (trip) report

Step 4
Follow up on the technical assistance report's recommendations

Step 1 Prepare a Scope of Work

What is a scope of work?

A scope of work (SOW) describes the nature of the relationship and the commitment between the private voluntary organization (PVO) and the technical assistance (TA) provider. The SOW may be part of a formal contract if an external TA provider is involved. Internal TA providers often require only a SOW.

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Prior to writing the SOW, it is useful to consider the following questions:

- What products or results do you want to have at the end of the proposed TA? What are your deliverables?
- What expertise do you need to accomplish these tasks and results?
- Who will manage or support the TA provider? How much time will that involve?
- What will be the level of staff involvement in producing the deliverables?
- Given the level of support, what will be the time required to produce these deliverables?
- What is your budget? Does the budget correspond with the time needed? Does your budget allow for the necessary equipment and transportation?

Tips from the Field
Build flexibility into the SOW and the timeline in case of potential delays in completing the fieldwork. Any substantive changes in the SOW should be written into a formal amendment and approved at the appropriate levels within your organization.

Remember to be realistic and allow adequate time for a quality project. Be specific in answering these questions and in drafting the SOW. A detailed and complete SOW will smooth the process for both you and the TA provider. Ultimately, the SOW will better align the final product with your needs and expectations.

Internal and External Service Providers

SOWs for longer-term assistance often differ in content for internal and external service providers. For internal TA providers, the SOW should include the ways in which the tasks relate to the staff member's job description and work plan and should include a degree of flexibility should the work ultimately require more steps or additional time than originally thought.

For longer-term assistance from external TA providers, draft a SOW for the immediate tasks and build flexibility into the contract to allow for future task orders.

Basic Elements of a SOW

- Specify the background and purpose of assistance to clarify the specific deliverables and the broader programmatic context in which the work will be conducted.
- Clearly define and describe the tasks and deliverables. Break the tasks and deliverables into steps and assign a certain number of days to each. See table 1 for examples.
- State the TA provider responsibilities, including, as appropriate, procedures for submitting invoices, proprietary rights to final products, and document standards or templates to be used. TA provider responsibilities are also often stated in the contract. The contractor's expectations about the place of work, review of materials, editing, and

revisions should also be included. Clearly state whether the TA provider is responsible for the final product. Check with your organization to see if boilerplate material is available for this information.

- Define contractor responsibilities and outline what the contracting staff person will be providing, such as technical support, equipment (e.g., a laptop and printer), background information, work space, payment, travel arrangements, and expenses. Include in this section any special circumstances that may influence the nature of the work, the work environment, or the final product.
- Include a detailed budget showing the total amount required for the work and a breakdown of expenses by category, such as transportation, communication, and per diem allowances.

Table 1: Specific Tasks and Deliverables

Tasks	Details	Days
Review background materials and initial planning	The contractor provides some background materials; the TA provider will find supplementary sources as needed. Some modification of the products and their descriptions may be made as a result of this task if mutually agreed upon by the TA provider and contractor. Due date:	2
Produce needs assess-ment tool	The TA provider will adapt materials from existing needs assessments and produce a needs assessment questionnaire. An adapted version of this questionnaire will also serve as an assessment tool to use with partner organizations. Due date:	2

Step 2 Evaluate the Technical Assistance

> **Note:**
> Private voluntary organization (PVO) staff are primarily responsible for steps 1 and 2, while step 3 is the TA provider's responsibility. Either party may be responsible for step 4, depending on the nature and duration of the tasks and the relationship between the TA provider within or outside the PVO.

Evaluation Benefits

Evaluating the TA and contracting processes provides the evaluator with information on what did and did not work well. Find ways to ensure that the findings inform future capacity-building events.

Design the Evaluation Tools

Develop simple standardized sheets for the final evaluation of all training and workshop events included in the capacity-building TA and of the assistance given. The training and workshop evaluation form should be short, but it should permit the facilitator to ask workshop-specific questions. The form should include, but is not limited to, the following:

- The utility of different tools, exercises, case studies, and so on
- The usefulness of innovative practical exercises or field trips
- Personal suggestions for improvements

Give participants a scale (1-5) to rate each aspect of the training or workshop. Allow up to 30 minutes for participants to complete the form and emphasize that detailed feedback is important. The facilitator should compile a summary of the evaluation feedback to be shared with key staff members and the TA provider.

The evaluation of technical assistance form should be similar in format to the training and workshop evaluation form. Again, the form should be short, but permit detailed feedback. Ask respondents to include their organizational title so that the feedback may be better interpreted. This form can be used for on-site technical visits and consultancies as well as for electronic or other forms of TA delivery. Arrange for a neutral party to compile the feedback so that the TA provider receives anonymous feedback. Share these results with all relevant staff members.

Step 3 Write the Technical Assistance Delivery (Trip) Report

Purpose of a Trip Report

A trip report serves several purposes, but it is primarily a record of activities that were completed during a field visit or during any form of TA. It is helpful to develop a standardized form for use within your organization so that standard information will be reported and shared after each TA delivery. Your primary audience is your task manager.

Required Sections of the Report

- Title page, including the name of the TA provider, report title, date and site of visit, task manager name and title, and date of report submission;
- Executive summary containing a brief overview of each section of the report. The summary should explain the purpose and outcomes of the trip;
- Main sections with the sectoral and thematic focus, including the purpose of the trip and the programmatic context;
- Findings and recommendations, in the form of problem statements with proposed alternative solutions. Identified strengths should also be included. Recommendations on technical, partnership, policy, emergency preparation and mitigation, general staffing, training, M&E, donor relationships, fundraising, and so on;
- Next steps based on the recommendations. A table format illustrating the follow-up action, the individuals responsible, the timeline, and relevant comments is useful in presenting this information; and

- Appendixes including the original SOW, the trip itinerary, and the list of people contacted as part of the assignment.

Step 4 Follow Up on the Technical Assistance

Send Thank-You Letters

Upon completion of the field trip and submission of the trip report, it is good practice to send a thank-you letter to the TA provider. In addition, it is a good idea to send a letter to other individuals who played a key role in the work, including partner staff or other stakeholders who were involved.

The Thank-You Letter

The thank-you letter should state the specifics of the field assignment and the aspects of the work or contribution that were particularly insightful or impressive, and include a statement about the action plan for follow-up activities. Use your organization's letterhead and copy the letter to relevant colleagues. See exhibit 1 for a suggested thank-you letter format.

Finally, check to see that the TA provider's recommendations are considered and, if appropriate, implemented.

Exhibit 1: Proposed Thank-You Letter Format

Date

Recipient Name
Recipient Address

Dear (insert recipient name);

Thank you for your assistance and support in (specify activities / tasks). I want to express my particular appreciation for (include specific personal or professional contribution). As discussed, I am moving ahead with (action items discussed).

Again, thank you for your valuable support.

Sincerely,

Insert your name
Insert your title

The Capacity-Building Module contains:

- Specific tasks and deliverables
- Budget worksheet for a SOW
- Trip report template
- Thank-you letter template
- Final evaluation form for trainings and workshops
- Final evaluation form for technical assistance

This edition of Short Cuts was produced in 2008. Please send your comments or feedback to: m&efeedback@crs.org.

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The M&E series is available on these Web sites:

- www.crs.org/publications
- www.foodsecuritynetwork.org/icbtools.html
- www.redcross.org

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