

## **POPTECH USERS' GUIDE**

### **I. BACKGROUND**

The Population Technical Assistance (POPTECH) Project provides USAID Missions with short-term technical assistance needed to improve the design, implementation and management of population/reproductive health programs. The project meets missions' TA requirements by drawing on an extensive database of over 700 consultants representing the many technical, academic and managerial disciplines related to the population/reproductive health sector, and by matching individual consultants and their skills to specific requirements identified by USAID missions.

+Over the past several years, USAID missions have utilized POPTECH consultants and consultant teams to:

- conduct mid-term and final evaluations of USAID-supported results packages, strategic objectives, and other activities in the population/reproductive field
- plan and design new or revised results frameworks, strategic objectives and results packages
- develop and manage workshops and conferences
- conduct special studies and assessments
- help missions address critical (short-term) staffing problems, such as might result from unanticipated absences of PHN personnel (early home leave, emergency leave, delays in assignment of new or replacement staff, etc.)

Missions can obtain the services of POPTECH consultants by allotting Field Support Funds to the POPTECH project (or by executing an OYB transfer to the project), and by submitting a Scope of Work (SOW) for the desired consultant services to the POPTECH project's CTO. The SOW would explain the task to be performed, the "deliverables" which the mission requires (e.g., an evaluation report, a results package, a revised results framework, etc.), the preferred time frame for the consultant assignment, and the consultant skills required to undertake the assignment. (See below for a more complete discussion of the elements to be included in a scope of work). The POPTECH project is managed by the Research Division of the Office of Population (G/PHN/POP/R); the project CTO is Victoria Ellis ([vellis@usaid.gov](mailto:vellis@usaid.gov)).

### **II. PURPOSE AND ORGANIZATION OF THIS USERS' GUIDE**

The POPTECH project provides USAID missions with highly flexible TA resources to support the planning, management and assessment of assistance programs in population and reproductive health. Experience has shown, however, that the value of POPTECH TA can be maximized when missions plan carefully and thoroughly for POPTECH assignments. This planning process is neither complex nor especially burdensome time-wise. But by giving close attention to a relatively few preparatory steps, missions can help ensure that they receive the consultant services and the products they need, while avoiding possible disappointments or misunderstandings during or after the execution of the POPTECH assignment.

This brief guide and checklist are designed to help mission personnel identify and complete the minimum steps needed to 1) access POPTECH TA and 2) ensure that the POPTECH TA responds successfully to mission requirements. The Guide is divided in two parts:

**Section III** identifies the key steps in the planning process, explains why these steps are necessary/important, and describes specific actions to be taken by the mission to complete each element of the planning process.

**Section IV** (the Checklist) is a series of reminders/prompts which will help mission staff make sure that they have addressed all of the essential steps in the planning process. Missions would also note in this checklist the names, titles and email addresses of key mission personnel responsible for managing the POPTECH assignment in-country. The POPTECH CTO in G/PHN/POP/R will use this mission-prepared checklist and the SOW to facilitate communication between the mission and POPTECH staff, and to help ensure that all parties share a common understanding regarding the timing and objectives of the assignment, the consultant skills required, and the deliverables expected by the mission.

### **III. PLANNING A POPTECH ASSIGNMENT**

#### **A. FORECASTING TA REQUIREMENTS**

**1) During the Annual Budget Planning Process:** Missions are often able to anticipate much of the short-term TA they will require during a forthcoming 12-month period. Examples of future TA needs which can be forecast well in advance might include TA to conduct scheduled mid-term and final evaluations; to develop new Results Frameworks and/or SOs; or to conduct assessments or develop documentation necessary for the preparation of requests for proposals/applications (RFPs or RFAs) for new assistance activities. PHN staff generally do such forecasting of TA requirements when they participate in their mission's annual budget planning process—a process that includes the identification of Field Support funded services required from G/PHN-managed projects such as POPTECH. The missions' estimates of their Field Support requirements provide USAID/W project managers/CTOs with the “forward look” they need to ensure that the projects they

manage will be able to respond effectively and on time to the missions' needs. This advance notice is the first critical step in planning POPTECH TA, as the success of a POPTECH assignment is often a function of the lead time available to recruit and field the highest-quality consultant(s) for the assignment

That said, the POPTECH TA requirements which missions identify during the annual budgeting process are often described in very general terms with regard to the nature of the task(s) to be accomplished, the time frame, skills and number of consultants needed, etc. Some vagueness in the mission's description of its TA requirements is to be expected at this juncture, i.e., prior to the mission's preparation of a scope(s) of work for the TA assignment(s). Nonetheless, and perhaps because of this (understandable) lack of clarity, some mission personnel are reluctant to engage USAID project managers in a substantive discussion of their TA requirements, at least until the parameters of the mission's TA requirements firm up. Mission PHN personnel need to overcome this reluctance and *discuss their anticipated POPTECH requirements—even if they are still unclear—as soon as possible with the POPTECH CTO, and as considered appropriate by the CTO, directly with POPTECH staff.*

**2) Ad hoc TA Requirements:** A typical population/reproductive health assistance program does not always cooperate with the USAID manager's most carefully wrought plans. *Ad hoc* TA requirements do and will emerge, often with relatively short lead times. In these instances, (i.e., when missions require unanticipated POPTECH TA) immediate communication with the POPTECH COTR is especially crucial, and should certainly not be delayed until the mission has developed a final SOW for the assignment. Several years experience with the POPTECH project indicate that at least 3-4 months' advance notice is required to recruit and field a "typical" consultant team, e.g., three persons recruited to conduct a final evaluation, or to develop a new SO. This lead time can be compressed in some cases; but missions should not assume that POPTECH will be able to respond to requests that leave inadequate time for screening, recruiting and scheduling expert consultants, many of whom have other professional, academic or consulting responsibilities.

## **B. THE SCOPE OF WORK**

The SOW serves as the mission's directions to POPTECH and to the consultant/consultant team fielded by POPTECH. A carefully prepared SOW is a critical factor in the quality and usefulness of a TA assignment.

### **1) Elements of a Scope of Work<sup>1</sup>**

- a) *Identify the task:* Briefly explain what the mission wants the POPTECH consultant or consultant team to do, e.g., evaluate an activity, Results Package or Strategic Objective; design a new Results Package, Strategic Objective; plan and manage a Partners' Conference; conduct a needs assessment in a

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<sup>1</sup> Parts of this discussion draw on USAID's Performance Monitoring and Evaluation TIPS document "Preparing and Evaluation Scope of Work" (CDIE, 1996, TIPS Number 3)

population/reproductive health sector or sub-sector, etc. Be as specific as possible. Include preferred start and completion dates for the assignment.

- b) *Background:* Give a brief description of the current program, its history and components, and the organizations/partners involved in its implementation. Provide any other information which the consultant(s) would find useful in understanding the current program (e.g., in the case of an evaluation assignment) or discuss the mission's rationale in calling for the design of a new/revised Results Package, SO, needs assessment, etc.
- c) *Identify Information Sources:* Identify relevant documents, information sources, performance data, etc. which would help the POPTECH consultant(s) perform the assignment.
- d) *Purpose of the Assignment:* Specify the need for and purpose of the TA. What service, information and/or product is needed? Why? Who will use it? When is it needed? If the task is to conduct an evaluation, identify the specific questions that the evaluation is supposed to answer. Provide the context for the questions, i.e., explain why the requested information is needed and how it will be used. Describe any special circumstances (political, organizational) which might be important to the execution of the consultant assignment.
- e) *Methodology of the Assignment:* Describe how the assignment is to be carried out, e.g., by a combination of interviews with USAID staff, other donors, partners, observation in the field, review of program and other documents, etc. Identify any special data sources which need to be considered, as well as any special data collection, studies or analyses that need to be conducted by the consultant(s). Identify any activities/tasks which the POPTECH consultants are expected to undertake beyond provision of TA. Examples might include disbursing funds for a conference to present the assignment's findings and conclusions to partners; making payments for travel and/or other costs of non-POPTECH participants in the assignment, etc.
- f) *Team Composition and Participation:* Identify the skills and qualifications which the mission seeks in a consultant or consultant team. Considerations include language proficiency; areas of technical expertise; in-country or regional expertise; prior experience with similar tasks (e.g., evaluation, program design, conference facilitation, etc.). If the assignment is to be carried out as a participatory process involving partners, other donors and/or "virtual team" members, describe the nature of their involvement in the work. Identify the service and/or product which these non-POPTECH participants are expected to contribute to the assignment, including any drafting responsibilities they may have toward preparation of a report, design document, assessment, etc. (*NB:* Make sure that these other participants have reviewed drafts of the SOW). Keep in mind that POPTECH will screen and recruit potential consultants on the basis of the skills and qualifications spelled

out in the SOW, so be as specific as possible. Be prepared, however, to accommodate occasional compromises in these consultant “descriptors”. Mission insistence that someone have “at least five years experience in country X”, or “ten years experience working on USAID projects” might eliminate consideration of other highly qualified candidates for the assignment. Indicate in the SOW the extent to which the mission is flexible in considering alternatives to the consultant “mix” described in the SOW. Would the mission accept, for example, one consultant having a combination of skills, rather than two persons with different skills? do all team members require the same level of language proficiency?

- g) *Schedule and Logistics:* What is the general schedule of the assignment—its beginning date, duration and completion date? Are there any holidays, major conferences or other events that might affect the execution of the assignment? Should the consultant/consultant team plan to work six-day weeks and holidays? What preparatory work should be undertaken in the United States prior to the consultant(s)’ arrival in-country (document reviews, interviews with donors, cooperating agencies, USAID personnel, team planning meeting, etc.). Note that if prior document reviews in the US are called for, the mission should forward to POPTECH any documents not available in the US. These documents should be forwarded to POPTECH approx. one month before the assignment is to begin, thereby allowing POPTECH adequate time to duplicate and distribute the materials to consultant team members. Describe the availability and provision of services—local translators (if needed), auto rental, drivers, travel services. Be specific in describing logistical support which the mission intends to provide *versus* that which the consultants will be expected to obtain for themselves. Examples include office space, secretarial support, car(s) and driver(s), computer equipment, etc.
- h) *Team Planning Meeting:* When missions request a team of consultants, it is necessary to schedule a team planning meeting (TPM), either in the US or in the country of assignment. The SOW and budget should include provision for at least one--and possibly two—days for the TPM, depending on the complexity of the assignment and the size of the consultant team. The principal objectives of the TPM are to 1) enable USAID personnel such as the CTO, SO Team and others to present to the team the purpose and agenda of the assignment, and to discuss any sensitive information not contained in the SOW; 2) identify primary and secondary clients, and agree on the approach to working with them; 3) enable the team to analyze and reach a common understanding on individual and team scopes of work, including the identification of individual member’s specific responsibilities for preparation of the assignment’s deliverables; 4) plan how the team will work together; 5) review and clarify logistic and administrative procedures for the assignment; 6) agree on the assignment’s objectives and outcomes; 7) develop a preliminary draft outline of the team’s report; and 7) share information on

individual working styles, and agree on a procedure for resolving differences of opinion both within the team and with the client.

- i) *Financial Management:* Budgets for POPTECH assignments are developed from the Scope of Work and are included in the Technical Direction Memo (TDM) authorizing us to make commitments and setting limits on the amount of money we are authorized to spend to accomplish the Scope of Work. A key information element in building budgets for assignments is knowing the full range of costs for the assignment and also knowing what mechanisms are available for converting dollars to local currency in-country. To allow sufficient time for cash advances for assignments to be processed, these documents need to be in place with CTO signature four weeks before consultants depart the U.S.

For all assignments, but especially those requiring POPTECH consultants to disburse funds for in-country support—such as conference expenses; conference participant hotels, travel, or M&IE; local consultants; mission counterparts and partners; local contractors and car/driver—missions should ensure that visiting consultants have access to mission-provided check-cashing services, unless specifically prohibited by US Embassy/USAID regulations. If missions are not able to arrange check-cashing privileges, they should advise POPTECH of that fact at least four weeks prior to the consultant(s)' departure from the U.S. and advise POPTECH about (a) what limits exist for bringing cash into the country, (b) how cash or travelers' checks are to be converted into local currency in-country, (c) and what limits—either frequency or amount-- exist for currency conversion. Note also that when the missions want POPTECH to make disbursements to individuals for in-country support, the missions must communicate the names (and in the case of travel, the likely itineraries) of these persons to POPTECH when the Scope of Work is forwarded. Finally, let POPTECH know what major credit cards are accepted/not accepted at the hotel(s) where the consultant(s) are likely to be lodged.

- j) *Deliverables:* Describe the product required as a result of the assignment. Examples include an evaluation report, a Results Package, a Results Framework, an RFA, etc. Specify the dates when the draft document(s) and the final document(s) are due; the number of copies required; the language in which the document(s) is needed; the page limits and format of the document(s); and its recipient(s). Note any special requirements for communicating or disseminating the results of the assignment. For example, if the deliverable is a design document including procurement-sensitive information, distribution would presumably be limited to internal USAID use only. Other types of documents, e.g., final evaluations, are usually posted on the CDIE website and/or on the POPTECH website ([www.poptechproject.com](http://www.poptechproject.com)) and are available for public access. Again, missions should specify their preference, which may fall somewhere between

the two options just noted. The SOW should be clear regarding the level of effort required for editing, revising and formatting the final report. In the case of an in-house/limited distribution report, for example, the mission may want the team to leave a draft report in country prior to the team's departure. In such instances, the mission usually provides consolidated comments to the team leader and to POPTECH at/about two weeks after the team's departure, and the team leader is given up to five days of LOE to incorporate the comments and complete the final report. Keep in mind that a specific, named individual in the mission should be responsible for consolidating and forwarding comments to the team leader and to POPTECH. This individual's role is especially important when several partner agencies and resource persons have been asked to comment on the draft report; only the mission can consolidate such varied and sometimes contradictory comments into a manageable and digestible set which reflects the mission's position. In the case of a report which is to be publicly distributed and web-posted report, the full report preparation process can often take up to three months and involve considerable editing assistance from the POPTECH staff. POPTECH teams generally prepare the first draft of such "public" reports after their departure from country. (The team would have presented its key findings and conclusions to the mission and partners prior to the team's departure from country). A typical timeline for preparation of a broadly-distributed final report is as follows:

-Team leader submits draft 1	2 weeks
-POPTECH distributes draft 1 to reviewers	1-2 days
-Other POPTECH team members, USAID and other reviewers comment on draft	2 weeks
-Mission consolidates comments for Team leader	1 week
-Team leader incorporates comments	2 weeks
-Team leader sends draft 2 to POPTECH	1-2 days
-POPTECH edits and formats draft 2	3 weeks
-POPTECH sends edited draft 2 to USAID for "substance" <sup>2</sup> clearance	1-2 days
-USAID reviews and provides "substance" clearance	2 weeks
-POPTECH finalizes, prints and distributes report and posts report to the POPTECH website	1 week
<b>Total</b>	<b>approx. 12-13 weeks</b>

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to appreciate that the findings and recommendations in consultant reports are third party opinions. Mission clearance does not necessarily indicate universal agreement with all of the report's findings and recommendations. Final decisions regarding the acceptance and/or implementation of such findings and recommendations are always the exclusive province of mission management. Although mission comments are often essential to eliminate errors of fact or misunderstanding, missions should resist the temptation to force their own views upon a consultant team by dictating the inclusion or elimination of findings or recommendations not consistent with the mission's views.

- k) *Budget*: Estimate the cost of the assignment and identify the source of funds (e.g., Field Support Funds, OYB transfer). Cost estimates should cover items such as international and in-country travel and per diem; consultant salaries; stipends for customers or partners as needed; payments for translators, drivers, secretarial services, meeting facilities, etc. Missions should consult with the POPTECH CTO to obtain cost data regarding POPTECH fees, overhead, and G & A related to the POPTECH contract. Missions should note that these budget estimates, once accepted by POPTECH, serve as funding ceilings for a POPTECH assignment. Missions should not, therefore, add additional activities (with their cost implications) to consultants' assignments once they have begun. Any funds attributed to the POPTECH contract can be disbursed only by POPTECH or its authorized agents, e.g., POPTECH consultants.

POPTECH staff can assist missions in the development and/or clarification of SOWs. Please request such assistance, if needed, through the POPTECH CTO.

## **B. QUALITY ASSURANCE**

A few basic measures can help ensure the success of a POPTECH assignment. These include:

1. **Early notification of mission TA requirements**: Inform the POPTECH CTO as soon as you think you might need POPTECH assistance. Remember that most POPTECH assignments require at least three-four months advance notice.
2. **Put someone in charge of the process**: Identify a professional-level member of the mission staff who will serve as the mission's contact person throughout the planning process for the assignment. Make sure that this person can represent the mission authoritatively—i.e., communicate decisions—to POPTECH and the POPTECH CTO.
3. **Look at the SOW as a “stand alone” document**: Does it explain everything that POPTECH needs to know to recruit the appropriate consultants? Does it adequately describe the assignment—and your expectations—to the consultant(s)? Are there any “hidden agendas” which need to be communicated to the consultant(s)? Make it a practice to have SOWs reviewed/cleared by the mission's performance monitoring & evaluation officer (in the case of evaluations) or the Project Development/Program Officer in the case of program design assignments. Also consider having your USAID country coordinator review the draft SOW and provide comments.
4. **Focus on the logistics**: It is not an effective use of costly consultant time to arrange in-country travel schedules, make appointments for briefings by partners and counterparts, locate auto rental firms/drivers/translators, etc. Missions should have at least the first week's meeting schedule in place before consultant(s) arrive

in-country. It is good practice to appoint a member of the mission staff to focus on logistic preparations for a POPTECH assignment. If mission staffing constraints make this impossible, the mission can include in the assignment budget the costs of a POPTECH-contracted host country national who will handle logistic preparations in advance of the arrival of a consultant team. In such instances, missions might be asked to help identify qualified persons for this advance work.

5. **Facilitate the funding process:** If possible/permissible, make sure that the consultant(s) are authorized to utilize the mission’s check-cashing system—especially important if the consultant(s) is expected to cover costs beyond his/her/their own expenses (conferences, travel and per diem of local consultants and/or partners, etc.). If the consultants need to bring a significant amount of cash and/or travelers checks with them, give POPTECH at least three weeks advance notice re the amount of funds required—and be prepared to assist the consultants transit customs in countries which monitor incoming foreign exchange. Inform POPTECH whether ATM machines are available locally, and what the maximum daily withdrawals are. Remember that POPTECH consultants cannot exceed the costs set forth in the assignment’s budget, so do not ask them to undertake additional, cost-related activities unless approved by the CTO and POPTECH.
  
6. **Help Resolve Conflicts (if any):** Differences of opinion or professional judgment—e.g., between a TA team and the mission, or within a TA team itself—sometimes emerge in the course of a TA assignment. Remember that external consultants are recruited for their technical expertise, professionalism and integrity. If their conclusions challenge mission views, try to understand their reasoning before dismissing such conclusions out of hand. If opposing views cannot be resolved, engage the mission’s own management structure (the SO Team, deputy mission director/mission director, etc.) to help reach a satisfactory outcome to the disagreement. Above all, approach such situations constructively; they can almost always be resolved if managed in an atmosphere of mutual respect and attentiveness to the various parties’ views.

**7. Remember Important Lead Times:**

- |                                                                                                      |                                    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| -Deliver SOW to POPTECH                                                                              | 3-4 months prior to the assignment |
| -Deliver review documents to POPTECH                                                                 | 1 month prior to assignment        |
| -Time needed for completion of an “internal” report (after consultants depart country of assignment) | approx. 3 weeks                    |
| -Time needed to complete revision, editing and formatting of a “public” report                       | approx. 12-13 weeks                |

**IV. CHECKLIST FOR POPTECH TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ASSIGNMENTS**

**Advance Planning:**

- 1) Has the POPTECH CTO been notified of likely/possible TA requirements?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_  
No \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 2) How much lead-time is available before the assignment is scheduled to begin?  
2 3 4 5 6 7 8-12 months (circle appropriate number)
  
- 3) Funding source identified (Field Support, OYB transfer, other)  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_  
No \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 4) Mission contact person identified?  
Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Title: \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Scope of Work:**

- 1) Does the SOW include all of the elements discussed in Section III.B of the POPTECH Users' Guide?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_  
No \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 2) What elements are not included, and why?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
- 3) Has the SOW been reviewed/cleared by the mission PM&E officer or the PDO/Program officer?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_  
No \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 4) Has the SOW been reviewed by your USAID/W country coordinator?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_  
No \_\_\_\_\_

5) Has the SOW been reviewed by any partners, virtual team members, others who will be substantively involved in the assignment?

Yes \_\_\_

No \_\_\_

6) Have review documents been identified, assembled and sent to POPTECH?

Yes \_\_\_

No \_\_\_

**Logistics Planning:**

1) Has the mission identified a staff member responsible for logistics planning?

Yes \_\_\_

No \_\_\_

2) If yes:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

3) If no, does the mission intend to request that POPTECH recruit/fund a host country national who will handle logistics planning prior to the arrival of the consultant (team)?

Yes \_\_\_

No \_\_\_

4) If yes, is this requirement included in the SOW and in the assignment budget?

Yes \_\_\_

No \_\_\_

5) If no, how does the mission plan to handle logistic arrangements for the assignment?

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6) Further to question #5, have provisions been made for meeting space, hotel reservations, translators, access to mission fax and email? Who is responsible for these arrangements?

Yes \_\_\_

No \_\_\_

Responsible Person: Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Title \_\_\_\_\_  
Email \_\_\_\_\_

7) Has the mission arranged for consultant check-cashing privileges?

Yes \_\_\_

No \_\_\_

8) If no, how does the mission propose that the consultant (team) access local currency for assignment-related costs?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Deliverables:**

1) What “product” does the mission expect from the consultant(s)?

Evaluation report: \_\_\_\_\_

Results Package: \_\_\_\_\_

Strategic Objective: \_\_\_\_\_

Special study or assessment: \_\_\_\_\_

Other (Specify): \_\_\_\_\_

2) In the case of an evaluation report, does the mission expect the team to deliver a draft report prior to their departure from the country?

Yes \_\_\_

No \_\_\_ (Mission expects presentation of key findings, conclusions and recommendations; report to follow in 2-3 weeks)

3) If yes, has the mission allowed adequate time for in-country drafting of the report, mission review and feedback to the team prior to the team’s departure from the country?

Yes \_\_\_

No \_\_\_

4) Does the POPTECH document need to be translated?

Yes \_\_\_

No \_\_\_

Language \_\_\_\_\_

*Please forward this checklist to the POPTECH CTO along with the Scope of Work for the planned POPTECH assignment.*

