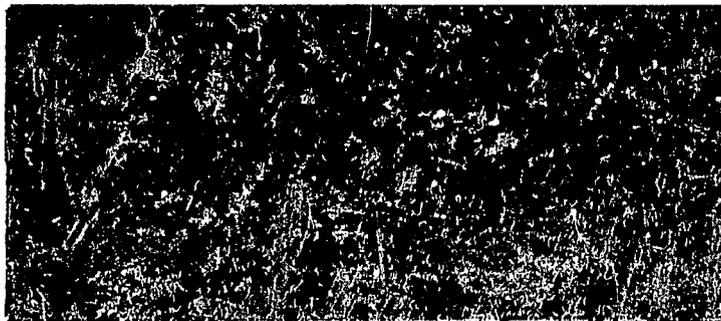


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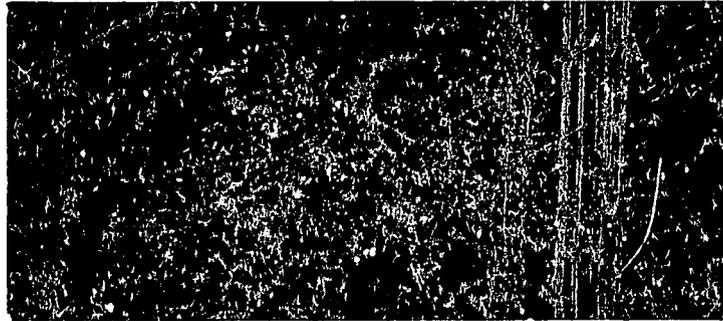
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U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of International Cooperation and Development
Technical Assistance Division

In cooperation with the

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The center operates under an agreement between the Agency for International Development (AID) and the U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) with funding from AID project 096, Project Management Effectiveness. The center's full-time staff provides consultant services and technical materials to institutions in less developed countries. The center also maintains a skill bank of consultants with expertise in various areas of project planning and implementation who are available for short- and long-term assignments. Located in the Technical Assistance Division of USDA's Office of International Cooperation and Development, the center is able to draw upon a wide variety of agricultural specialists to complement its work. In addition, through the AID project, the center has a collaborative relationship with the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration and can draw upon a wide range of development administration specialists.

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MAKING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TEAMS
MORE EFFECTIVE, THE TPM
(TEAM PLANNING MEETING) ADVANTAGE

This DPMC paper was authored by
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Team Planning Meeting (TPM) is a systematic approach to preparing individuals to provide technical assistance to development efforts around the world. It has been developed by the Technical Assistance Division (TAD) of the Office of International Cooperation and Development (OICD) of the Department of Agriculture. The Development Project Management Center (DPMC) of OICD/TAD, created in 1976 by AID/S&T to improve project management for development, piloted this approach with short-term technical assistance teams in 1980 and 1981. The refinement of the TPM approach was sponsored by OICD in 1982-83 with the specific purpose of improving the quality of development services provided in U.S. sponsored technical cooperation efforts.

This paper provides an overview of Team Planning Meetings -- what they are, how they are useful for technical assistance activities and when they should be used. The paper was written by Dr. Merlyn Kettering of DPMC who initiated the methodology and provided technical guidance for its development in USDA.

The original text was edited by Mr. Terry Schmidt who has extensive experience in training and development projects and who has participated in and designed several TPMs. Mr. Morris Solomon, Coordinator of DPMC, and Ms. Yvonne Jackson-Anduaem of OICD/TAD, Coordinator of the USDA/OICD Task Force, reviewed the text and suggested revisions to make the paper more responsive to project management and the development context.

Mr. David Levine, Mr. William LeClere and Ms. Bettye Harrison-Burns, the three consultants who have led the development of TPM and its application with project teams, have also reviewed the paper and made improvements on both content and presentation. Their insight and commitment to this effort has contributed significantly to its success.

TPM has benefited from the involvement of many persons in USDA/OICD and AID over the past two years:

Dr. Joan Wallace, Administrator of OICD, who appreciates the value of TPM and provided early encouragement to the effort;

Dr. William Hoofnagle, Acting Director of OICD/TAD, who recognized the importance of DPMC's early efforts and provided leadership, assured resource availability and supported the TPM, recommending its use with TAD teams;

Mr. Harry Mattox, Assistant Acting Director of OICD/TAD, who provided critical leadership to the Task Force and support to the effort through his day-to-day involvement and guidance;

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Ms. Yvonne Jackson-Anduaem, Technical Assistance Officer, OICD/TAD, who served as Coordinator of the Task Force and was fully involved in all Task Force activities and in each TPM that was held, and who in general took responsibility for assuring the high morale and involvement of the Task Force Membership; and

The USDA/OICD Task Force whose members gave freely of their time and energy to develop, pilot and modify the TPM approach through iterative applications to TAD teams and to set the stage for acceptance of TPM within OICD.

The effort has been successful because so many got involved and worked hard for success and practicality. The development of TPM has been exciting, and we believe that it represents a substantive contribution to technical cooperation between U.S. institutions and less developed nations. Taken seriously by client and consultant alike, it has real possibility for long-term impact and institutional improvement which benefits both the developing nations and organizations involved in development work.

MERLYN KETTERING
February, 1984

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INTRODUCTION: THE NEED FOR MORE EFFECTIVE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TEAMS

Donor agency and host country organizations place great reliance on technical assistance teams. Short-term teams are called on to design projects, conduct evaluations, develop training programs or otherwise support development projects and programs. Such teams are typically comprised of two to five (or more) individuals from universities, government agencies and consulting firms who become a project team for the duration of the assignment.

Short-term technical assistance teams are common due to the need for the specialized, scarce, and interdisciplinary expertise required to solve development problems. Such teams are a vital development resource whose recommendations the sponsoring agencies follow to carry projects forward. The importance of their work puts the teams under enormous pressure to achieve significant results in the few short weeks or months of the assignment.

For longer term tasks, resident teams are used for one or more years. Such teams represent a large investment, tend to have complex assignments and perform vital development functions that require close coordination of a number of disciplines. The early relationship among team members has a critical bearing on the success of the project. The coherence and style of the team on arrival can influence how the team is perceived by the donor and the host country people with whom they will be dealing.

Both the long-term and the short-term teams have good reasons to function well upon arrival at the host country.

Team Obstacles to Success

While team members usually come equipped with first-class technical credentials, the environment of development activities -- complex, dynamic and uncertain -- makes success difficult to achieve. The development environment entails an overlapping and often conflicting set of interests and actors within the team itself. Technical assistance assignments are difficult due to the complex nature and design of many projects, unclear or unrealistic goals, technical uncertainties and administrative complications.

In addition to such environmental complexities, the very nature of teams organized to carry out activities with specific objectives in a limited time period involves additional obstacles to achieving the ambitious results expected of them. Among the most common obstacles:

- Most technical assistance team members are from different disciplines and professions and have not worked together before or on this type of assignment. Their experience, expectations, and motivations differ.
- Team members hold different understandings of their client's expectations, goals and objectives of their assignment.

- Team members bring distinctly different analytic frameworks, problem-solving approaches, and technical "languages".
- Precious time must be spent on logistics, administrative items, and "getting organized", leaving too little time for the actual work.
- Separate work scopes for individuals may not define and integrate the results expected from the team; a single team work scope may not be disaggregated into clear individual assignments.
- Team members may arrive in the field at different times, stay for varying periods, and depart at different times, leaving one person to assemble partial contributions into a coherent final report.
- The pressure to perform in a limited time can cause competition, conflict, and dissension among team members, which lowers morale and diminishes the quality of results.

Because of these practical and sometimes unavoidable problems, team performance frequently disappoints clients. Final reports are often fragmented and incomplete, with gaps, overlaps, and inadequate documentation of key findings. In short assignments, teams frequently concentrate on the report and ignore the critical need to prepare the client to accept and act on recommendations the report describes. Strained relations with the primary clients and hosts may sour the atmosphere of trust and open communications needed for the best results.

Efforts of the visiting team, in both long-term and short-term assignments, are hampered by a lack of an agreed-on-approach on how the different members will function in relation to each other, and how host country colleagues will become part of a total team. Relationships tend to be dominated by personalities of the team, the Mission or host country officials rather than the relevant objectives of the activity.

During the past three years, DPMC (Development Project Management Center, OICD/USDA) has developed and tested a methodology for reducing the predictable problems which diminish team results. The process, called the Team Planning Meetings (TPM), has been successfully used to help teams of different size, composition, and mission prepare to carry out their assignments and achieve objectives as an organized, integrated team, not as a collection of individuals. TPM builds on our experience and on similar efforts initiated by others to provide a method to ensure that team performance is of high quality and that credibility is maintained with AID and host country clients.

Teams, sponsoring organizations, and host institutions have noted the improved performance TPM brings. Individuals who have participated in TPM sessions -- both beginning consultants and seasoned hands -- have responded enthusiastically to the benefits TPM brings. Representatives of AID and other sponsoring organizations who have taken part in TPM knew their teams well and how they would work, felt better able to guide the teams, and were

better prepared to handle support, administration, and follow-up. Unsolicited comments from host country clients and field offices express their satisfaction with the high degree of team preparedness and productivity.

TPM is effective because it strikes at the fundamental causes of team failure. While not all team problems can be resolved by TPM, of course, the most common ones can, thus freeing the team to focus on performance.

The remainder of this paper describes the TPM objectives, benefits and approach. While the emphasis to date has been in preparing OICD/USDA teams for overseas technical assistance activities, the process applies equally well to U.S. delegations preparing for overseas representation, trade, negotiations, or technology transfer; inter and intra-agency task forces in the federal government; and other situations which involve creating teams to carry out specific, important, complex assignments.

Sponsoring and implementing organizations will find TPM a worthwhile, cost-effective way to get the maximum payoff from their technical assistance efforts. Organizations can ensure their investment by including TPM as the first stage of an assignment for a team.

IMPROVING TEAM PERFORMANCE: THE TPM APPROACH

TPM is an organized process by which a group of persons responsible for an assignment come together in a concentrated effort to define, plan for, and mobilize to accomplish the work. TPM covers two dimensions: **task functions**, or what is to be done and how, and **team building**, melding the members into an effective temporary organization. The objectives of TPM include:

- Assuring that all logistical and administrative arrangements are understood and in place.
- Achieving agreement concerning objectives, strategy, roles and responsibilities for both the team and for each member.
- Establishing processes for reviewing the work and for redirecting the effort as necessary to reach the objectives.
- Developing awareness and sensitivity to cultural characteristics and organizational factors influencing the team's performance.
- Resolving any organizational representation issues involved with the assignment and reflecting the interests of the multiple organizations and individuals participating on the team (e.g., AID, USAIDs, USDA, universities, host country institutions, consulting firms).

TPM prepares teams by recognizing that the technical assistance effort is itself a "project" to be carried out by a temporary organization. That project organization must first be formed -- objectives must be defined, roles and responsibilities understood, internal operational procedures developed, criteria developed to guide their strategy, and so forth. The process encourages team members to address sensitive issues that, if not surfaced, can lead to counterproductive behavior. For instance, the issues of organizational representation (e.g., a university professor working on a USDA team to carry out a USAID assignment in the host country's Ministry of Agriculture) and individual motivations (e.g., a consultant who joined the team in expectation of getting his firm favorably known to the host country organization) are usually critical ones. Through TPM, team members candidly address such topics and reach agreements which can accommodate the interests of all. The TPM process helps to establish a team norm of collaboration and expectations for mutual support during and after the work day.

TPM sessions are best conducted as the first state of an assignment as the field team prepares to depart, with guidance by an experienced facilitator. Participants include members of the field team -- those who will carry out the field work -- plus persons from the "broader" team. The broader team includes resource and support persons from the sponsoring organizations who have played roles in defining the assignment and who will have backup responsibility for implementing the field team's recommendations.

The TPMs are not a step preceding the consultancy assignment. Rather, they are an activation period whose planning sessions are integral to the actual work.

TPM sessions involve all members of both the field and broader team who can be brought together in an intensive effort to:

- become acquainted, share their backgrounds, experience, motivations, perceptions, and expectations of the assignment;
- review the history of the assignment to understand how it fits into broader program and project activities;
- identify the constellation of "clients" involved in the assignment, understand their relationships and legitimate interests, and determine how the team fits into this picture;
- review the team and individual scopes of work so there is agreement and understanding by the team and the sponsoring organizations;
- establish clear and agreed-upon strategies, objectives and outputs, and modes of team operation;
- establish a tentative action plan, including means for reviewing objectives and validating work with field personnel, clients, and members who may join the team in the field;

- agree on specific assignments, responsibilities, and deadlines for individual assignments;
- create guidelines and standards for ongoing formative evaluations of the effort and steps for redirection if necessary;
- share personal preferences and expectations for the use of "private" time as well as work time; and
- reach consensus on team norms so behavioral expectations are clear and comfortable to all.

Clearly, if a project team jointly tackles these issues up front, they will be prepared to "hit the ground running" and deliver better results.

The length of the TPM will depend upon the nature of the assignment, team size and composition and other influencing factors. The core process requires approximately 20 hours which can be extended to as much as 35 hours or more for complex assignments. Although the TPM is usually conducted in a concentrated block of time close to the team's departure, it can be scheduled to accommodate the requirements of the team and/or sponsoring agency.

DESIGN OF THE TPM

Conceptually, TPM is organized into interrelated modules. TPM design permits flexibility to respond to individual team characteristics and specific needs. Nine core modules are considered standard for all teams:

1. getting acquainted and expectation sharing activities;
2. relevant history/background of the project and assignment;
3. team assignment objectives and scope of work;
4. individual roles and responsibilities;
5. action planning;
6. review, feedback and evaluation plans;
7. team interaction dynamics: strengths and difficulties;
8. institutional representational issues; and
9. administrative support: requirements and procedures.

Other modules can be added to the core design to meet special team requirements, such as cultural orientation, integrating new team members in the field, technical briefings, design and evaluation methodologies, family stress, and orientation to AID Mission terms and processes.

Some of these modules can also be used to prepare a single traveler on a short-term assignment. Even when a single person is on TDY, this individual forms linkages with others to become a member of a team with the Washington-based support and guidance organizations (OICD, AID, World Bank) and with field operations (host country, USAID) once in-country.

HOW TPM DIFFERS FROM ORIENTATION

Traditionally, sponsoring organizations give an "orientation" to persons undertaking a field assignment. TPM differs from the typical orientation in five significant ways --

- (1) focus on both team and individual results,
- (2) concern with the process as well as the end result of the assignment,
- (3) building of good management practices for the team to follow in their work,
- (4) start of substantive project work, and
- (5) activation of a team on its assignment.

Team and Individual Focus

Traditionally, separate scopes of work (SOWs) written by the sponsoring organizations would describe in detail what was expected of individual team members: individual SOWs were prepared for each person, with the assumption that these would somehow add up to a logical team effort.

In contrast, TPM brings together the team members with each other and with representatives from the sponsoring organizations to review team and individual scopes of work to ensure understanding and to negotiate any differences in interpretation or intention. This builds project continuity, much of the technical assistance effort is initiated by members of the broader team before the field team takes over and continues after they finish their temporary assignment.

Concern With Process and Product

Traditional orientation focuses on what is to be done, as described by the SOWs, but little attention is given to how it will be done, how much latitude there is for innovation and flexibility in interpretation, and how team members will represent themselves in the field.

The orientation approach assumes that if persons are technically qualified, they will know both what to do and how to do it, including performing the various representational roles they will face. In contrast, TPM acknowledges that although persons are often selected because of their technical skills, they also play a broad range of roles including U.S. agency representative, diplomat, all-purpose problem solver, negotiator, administrator, supervisor, communicator, and innovator, in addition to their nominal roles as technical experts and consultants. To effectively fill these varied roles and expectations requires communications and team operations.

Builds Team Management Practices

TPM creates sound team management practices and develops operational norms for both individuals and the team. During their first meetings as a team, the facilitator helps to stimulate useful management practices for the team to follow in their work. For example, if the team leader is a dominant individual whose behavior shuts out less vocal members, the facilitator will solicit their opinions at each stage, thus establishing the group norm of active participation by all.

Begins the Actual Work

Finally, orientation is often viewed as preceding the "actual" work and focuses on logistics and administration rather than on the substance or process of the work. By contrast, TPM is in fact the first stage of a technical assistance assignment, during which the team establishes a comprehensive (but tentative) strategy for completing their objectives.

Activation of the Team

Orientation is usually a passive activity, i.e., information is fed to the team. In contrast, the TPM is an active process which requires the participation of the team to produce some materials, i.e., team workplans and schedules, and to test the credibility of these in relation to program goals with organizational representatives at the start-up of an assignment.

SUMMING UP: THE TPM ADVANTAGE

Technical assistance efforts are too important and too expensive for their outcomes to be left to chance. Sponsoring organizations can increase payoff from their development investment by insisting that technical assistance teams first go through the intensive plans-building and team process-building which TPM provides, as the first stage of an assignment. The demonstrated TPM benefits may be summed up as:

A well prepared field team. Field teams are ready to begin substantive work immediately on arrival. They understand the task, they understand

each other, they have an efficient, client-oriented workplan and are prepared to swiftly tackle the task.

An integrated team. The administrative, resource, and support persons who preceded and who will follow the assignment have worked closely with the field team, thus ensuring continuity. By integrating the field team with the broader team, TPM links the technical assistance assignment with the logical past and probable future of the broader effort.

A responsive field strategy. The team is prepared to respond to the unknowns they will encounter in the field and they understand their latitude for change. By building a tentative field strategy and creating processes for strategy review and adaptation, they are equipped to respond to new developments and factors that emerge in-country with confidence and competence.

Improved morale and performance. Team members know what is expected of them and their colleagues. Because they establish comfortable norms of team behavior, performance, and decision-making, the interpersonal difficulties that often sour team performance are reduced, so the full motivations and contributions of each individual can be engaged.

A better team result. The TPM process means that the team is prepared to deliver responsive results, whether those results are a document, a set of actions, or a client behavioral change. The work of the team and their products are consistent with the longer term, encompassing programs they are to support.

Improved feedback and learning. TPM benefits technical assistance efforts by providing improved feedback to AID, USDA and other institutions on their performance and on recruitment and performance of individual team members that would not otherwise be available. In addition to improving the way individual teams work together, it points to weaknesses and strengths of individuals and the organizations so that actions can be taken for improvement. This short-term effect is to alert team members to the need for strengthening weaker members. In the longer term, TPM feedback should improve recruitment and organizational performance.

The TPM advantage -- technical assistance teams that are informed, integrated, responsive, client-oriented, prepared for action, and productive -- more than justifies the modest resource investment required.

DPMC is currently engaged in an effort to standardize TPM in OICD/USDA assignments. We are prepared (within staff limitations) to assist interested organizations with TPM, or to recommend other individuals skilled in providing this assistance.