

**USAID/Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance**

**Partner Guidance: Statement of Work (SOW) Template for Formative Research Activities (Updated Jan 2021)**

|  | This document is intended as a guide for USAID/BHA partners in developing statements of work (SOWs) associated with formative or implementation research. Core components and contents of a SOW are outlined below. Partners should tailor or modify this guidance to fit the specific needs of their project or research questions. Preliminary SOWs can be used in the recruitment of qualified research partners (e.g., university groups, consultants) or in the development of plans to carry out research internally. If contracting out research activities, a proposal would typically be submitted by applicants responding to the SOW. For further guidance on designing and carrying out research (e.g. identifying research partners; developing research questions; selecting research methods; data analysis), please see resources in Annex 3 at the end of this document. |
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Problem Statement / Theory of Change Information Gap Summary

This section should briefly (i.e., in 3-5 sentences) describe the information gap, evidence gap, or logical problems identified in the Theory of Change (TOC) that need to be addressed through the proposed pilot study or formative research study. Clearly articulate this in the form of a problem statement. This section should also reference any changes to the operational context since application, if applicable, such as changes in the security situation in the implementation area.

Research Justification

Clearly justify the need for primary research through at least one of the following (1-3 paragraphs): ● A more in-depth summary of the TOC that identifies a clear knowledge gap and/or need for activity-specific contextualization. If relevant, the revised ToC pathway or pathways relevant to this research may be included as an annex, however this is not required.

● Review of past project performance (e.g., previous USAID/Office for Food for Peace or BHA programming), and/or relevant scholarly or grey (non-academic) research that demonstrates a need for improved or novel approaches to address a programmatic or technical challenge.

● Available desk research or secondary data is insufficient to address the knowledge or contextualization gaps identified above.

This section should be used to demonstrate (1) how a knowledge gap may impede the implementation or evaluation of a purpose or activity, or reduce its effectiveness, and (2) that the gap has not already been addressed by another study.

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Key Research Objectives

This section should briefly outline the key research objectives. What are the primary objectives of the proposed research? What will this research allow the activity or purpose to accomplish? Partners should include a narrative and/or a bulleted list of objectives.

Research Methods

|  | Please note that BHA does not endorse or recommend any specific research methods, but encourages partners to ensure appropriate, rigorous methods are used. BHA encourages implementing partners (IP) and research partners working with IPs to balance extractive methods (e.g., lengthy household surveys), which place a heavy demand on the time/energies of participants, with other approaches that meaningfully engage communities and other stakeholders. Non-traditional research methods, e.g., community consultations and participatory approaches, can yield valuable information that can be used to improve long-term outcomes. |
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This section should provide a narrative description of the proposed research methods and other key considerations for data collection and use. Using the subsections below, provide a high-level summary of the proposed research questions, methods of data collection, data analysis, justification for the proposed methods, and other considerations. Note that a detailed table of each research question, data source, method, and justification should be included, such as the one outlined in Annex 1.

● **Research Questions.** Identify the set of research questions that will be addressed through the research activity, making sure to align these questions with the overall objective/purposes identified in the first section (above). A recommended best practice is to provide a justification for each research question (and sub-question, if applicable) to ensure that each set of research questions fits within the scope of the research activity and will generate useful, actionable insights that can be used immediately to improve activity implementation within the implementation timeline. The number and scope of these questions should be appropriate to fit the proposed budget and timeline.

● **Data Source/Collection Methods.** Identify what data will be gathered and/or used to conduct the analysis, how these data will be obtained, and who will collect it. A recommended best practice is to provide a justification for the choice of each data collection method. For example, if focus groups will be used, explain who will be recruited to participate in the focus groups (e.g. care group participants, male caretakers, et cetera) and why this method will generate the most meaningful insights; if key informant interviews will be used, explain approximately how many participants will be recruited and any selection criteria that will be used to select participants. If a survey will be used, this section should include an overview of the sampling methodology. Whatever methods are chosen, the best descriptions of data collection methods describe whom will be used as respondents.

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● **Data Analysis Methods.** Identify how the data will be analyzed for each research question and/or sub-question, and how data (across research questions) will be synthesized and used to generate useful, actionable insights to improve activity implementation. For example, if qualitative and quantitative analysis will be used to answer different sub-questions, how will these data be synthesized? A recommended best practice is to provide a justification for the choice of analysis methods and a summary of how the findings will be validated.

● **Research Justification.** Briefly explain why this research is needed for implementation and how findings will be used. For example, if a common approach, such as the Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) model, has worked elsewhere but has not performed well in a new geographic area, a study may be needed to understand why.

● **Data Handling.** Discuss data entry and cleaning and procedures for ongoing data management and quality assurance. Describe how data will be stored and document the procedures used to preserve confidentiality during the transmission, use and storage of data and the roles or names of persons responsible for data stewardship. Describe the final disposition of records, data, computer files, specimens, and/or other materials at the end of the study. Discuss data handling plans for any sub-awards. Describe identified local and international partners participating in the research and their roles and responsibilities.

● **Mitigating risks and handling unexpected or adverse events.** Summarize considerations (or pose questions) that the research team should think about related to how research risks will be identified and mitigated. For example:

o Do proposed methods of data collection expose enumerators, researchers, or program staff to new risks, or is data drawn on already-existing lines of data production (such as an M&E or health information system)? Are there risks or barriers to the use of a particular data collection method in this context?

o Describe the types of adverse events that might be encountered and how study personnel will be prepared to react. Describe methods that will be used to track adverse events and their potential impact on the study.

Individual research questions and justifications, together with each question’s methods of data collection and analysis, should be presented in a table in **Annex 1** (“Key Research Questions and Proposed Methods”).

Ethical Considerations

A recommended best practice is to include a brief discussion of ethics issues that research teams need to take into consideration, e.g., confidentiality and the mitigation of potential risks to people who agree to participate in any research activities as participants (e.g., interviewees or focus group participants).

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|  | Along with many other Federal Agencies, USAID has adopted the Common Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects in research (often called the “Common Rule”) – see 22 CFR 225 (Annex B, part 1). The Common Rule describes the various functions and processes needed to ensure protection of human subjects (i.e., people participating in research), defines relevant terminology and concepts, and specifies how and when the rules apply in different circumstances. USAID also has the following ADS guidance which aids project management by further explaining the underlying principles and their application in various situations. Partners planning to conduct research that involves human subject testing will be expected to submit their research proposal to an Institutional Review Board (IRB) for protocols for review and approval, or explain why doing so is not feasible. |
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Team Composition / Team Lead Competencies

Describe minimum qualifications for the study team and/or team leader who will execute the work. This may include an entirely external team; a combination of external researchers/consultants and implementing partner staff; and/or implementing partner staff (e.g. regional or technical advisors who serve as short-term technical consultants who are not full-time on the activity).

Deliverables

This section should clearly articulate what should be delivered as a final product (e.g. final report or equivalent product).

|  | Alternatives to a full written report are acceptable as a final product for many R&I activities, such as a presentation with slides or materials for a community consultation process. BHA also wishes to note the importance of being succinct and of stressing quality over quantity for the final product. |
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If a study report is required as a deliverable, the partner should clearly define the sections that should be included in the report, such as:

o Research questions

o Methodology and Limitations

o Summary of key findings

o Recommendations (All recommendations should be specific and actionable) o Annexes (if applicable)

The partner should clearly define any other deliverables, as appropriate, e.g., a virtual or in-person presentation of the key findings and overview of the recommendations and a PDF of a slide deck version of the presentation.

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Period of Performance / Timeline

● Should detail date on which research or consultancy services (e.g., activities, deliverables) should commence and end.

● Research timeline should be appropriate for the planned scope of the study. ● Partners should ensure that the timeline includes sufficient time for incorporation of study findings into implementation within the Refinement Period, e.g., prior to the submission of the PREP.

Roles and Responsibilities

● A brief description of mutually agreed on roles and responsibilities of the client (i.e., implementing partner) and the contractor (e.g. consultant; research group; etc.)

Estimated Budget and Level of Effort

● Does not need to be included in SOW or reviewed by USAID, but the budget and/or level of effort (e.g., for internal consultants or short-term technical experts who will be conducting or leading the study) should be mutually agreed upon between prime and any sub-awardee.

● Should detail the total value for services as well as an estimated number of hours of professional service, as appropriate.

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Annex 1. Key Research Questions and Proposed Methods

| #  | Research Question  | Data Source / Collection Method  | Data Analysis Method  | Research Justification / How findings will be used  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1  | E.g. What factors explain low adoption of handwashing behaviors despite high knowledge of handwashing? | Focus groups; interviews FG’s will include caretakers; will include groups of women-only, mixed, and men-only | Qualitative Constant comparative method (with independent coding) | Previous USAID activity demonstrated 92% knowledge of handwashing at endline; however, handwashing among caretakers was less than 10%. An approach is needed that will address this gap between knowledge and behavior. We also know that [x strategy] used previously failed, so this research aims to identify what approaches / factors should be considered for upcoming implementation. |
| 2  | Add research questions |  |  |  |

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Annex II. Preliminary Results Application Plan

The preliminary results application plan should be prepared by the implementing partner. This document should be submitted to the AOR with the full SOW, but it does not necessarily need to be shared with the research team and/or consultants who will be carrying out the research.

This annex provides a framework for acting upon recommendations which emerge from formative research activities. When BHA reviews this plan, we will be looking for the following:

● **Length.** 1-2 paragraphs that reflect the partner’s initial plan for how research results will be used to refine their project design or implementation plan.

● **Utilization of Findings & Recommendations for Activity Phase 2.** The Results Action Plan should reflect the partner’s initial plan for how they will utilize research results within their Year 2 Pipeline and Resource Estimate Proposal (PREP) required documents.

● **Actionable.** All research undertaken as part of the activity is intended to be field-viable and field-ready, with a key goal of preparing local systems and institutions to assume financial and technical responsibility for the implementation of nutrition programming over the course of the activity. Therefore, this plan should reflect the partner’s initial thinking on how to apply findings in a concrete and actionable manner, with the understanding that this plan can and should be revised as results become available. Initial plans might include methods by which local systems and institutions are engaged in the research, and how they are being supported to champion, lead, and manage new approaches or methods that are being tested.

● **Specific.** Initial plans and recommendations should strive to be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely (i.e. ‘SMART’). For example, rather than giving a broad recommendation like “Increase milk and fodder production and bring it closer to the home,” provide specific tasks like "Convene 3 action planning meetings with communities and private sector to develop clear subsidy and distribution models to increase fodder availability to vulnerable households. Use bi-weekly SMS messages to monitor availability of milk or other nutrient-dense foods during the lean season.”

● **Learning.** This plan may also include descriptions of how findings will be disseminated, published, and/or incorporated into institutional memory.

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Annex III. Helpful Resources

This annex includes resources that may be helpful for implementing partners, their sub-awardees, and/or research partners who may be conducting primary or secondary research.

1. **Assessment Capacities (Acaps) Project Library**, available: https://www.acaps.org/library. Includes technical briefs relevant to implementing partners:

● **Direct Observation and Key Informant Interview Techniques for primary data collection (2011):**

https://www.acaps.org/sites/acaps/files/resources/files/key\_informant\_and\_direct\_obse rvation\_pocket\_version.pdf and

https://www.acaps.org/sites/acaps/files/resources/files/direct\_observation\_and\_key\_inf ormant\_interview\_techniques\_for\_primary\_data\_collection\_during\_rapid\_assessmen ts\_october\_2011.pdf

● **Data Cleaning (2016):**

https://www.acaps.org/sites/acaps/files/resources/files/acaps\_technical\_brief\_data\_clean ing\_april\_2016\_0.pdf

2. **The Compass & Breakthrough Action. (2015). How to Guide: How to Conduct Qualitative Formative Research**, available:

https://www.thecompassforsbc.org/how-to-guides/how-conduct-qualitative-formative-research

**Summary:** A how-to guide for formative research that is focused on social and behavior change (SBC) that provides step-by-step instructions on the process and key elements for executing focus group discussions (FGD) and In-depth interviews (IDI).

3. **FHI360 (2005). Qualitative Research Methods: A data collector’s field guide,** available:

https://www.fhi360.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/Qualitative%20Research%20Method s%20-%20A%20Data%20Collector's%20Field%20Guide.pdf.

**Summary:** A ‘how to’ field guide and training, particularly for data collection staff, on public health projects that provides the basics of qualitative data collection and management. The document includes five modules on: qualitative methods overview; participant observation; in-depth interviews; focus groups, and data documentation and management.

4. **USAID Developer Resources**, available: https://www.usaid.gov/developer.

**Summary:** USAID webpage with links to a number of data resources of relevance to partners (e.g. the DEC, AIDData).

5. **USAID LEARN Contract and the USAID Learning Lab website (2014-2019).** Available: https://usaidlearninglab.org.

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**Summary:** Project website for the USAID LEARN contract that supports strategic learning and knowledge management for USAID partners and staff. The Learning Lab website provides substantial guidance on topics of relevance to partners engaging in the R&I process—planning for CLA, Learning Agendas, and Adaptive Management. Some key resources include:

● How to Establish a Learning Agenda:

https://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/establishing\_a\_learning\_agen da\_guidance\_and\_template\_201702.pdf

● Learning Questions Checklist:

https://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/learning\_questions\_checklist \_december\_2018.pdf

● Pivot Log Template: https://usaidlearninglab.org/library/pivot-log-template ● Tips for Developing Good Evaluation Questions:

https://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/tips\_for\_developing\_good\_e valuation\_questions\_2016.pdf

6. **USAID (2017). Research Questions & Methodologies for Biodiversity and Development Research Agenda,** available:

https://rmportal.net/biodiversityconservation-gateway/resources/projects/measuring-impact/mi -project-resources/research-questions-methodologies-bio-development-research-agenda.

**Summary:** Concise, high-level technical guidance on how to develop research questions and research methods (systematic reviews, secondary data analyses, impact evaluations, and primary data collection) (6 pp).

7. **USAID (2018). WASH Formative Research Landscape Review,** available: https://www.fsnnetwork.org/sites/default/files/PRESENTATION\_GREGOIRE.pdf

**Summary:** Brief technical presentation on the goals of formative research as they relate to WASH within FFP programming, and ideas on how partners can develop and design an approach to WASH FR, as well as a brief comparison of methods and illustrative research questions.

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