



# Federal Ministry of Budget and National Planning



Lessons Leaflet

March 2017

## Managing a Help Desk: Key lessons from the Budget Office Help Desk



### Background

In September 2015, the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari introduced the Zero Base Budgeting (ZBB) system for the preparation of the 2016 budget of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Consequently, Nigeria's public service and personnel utilised new budgeting tools and new skills to ensure delivery of the budget tasks, which required justification for every item listed in the budget.

A major lesson from the experience of the 2016 budget preparation was the need to institutionalize the mechanism for providing support to Budget and Planning officers of Federal Ministries Department and Agencies (MDAs). Thus, the Ministry of Budget and National Planning of the Federal Republic of Nigeria initiated the Budget Office of the Federation (BOF) Help Desk to bridge the capacity gaps associated with the use of ZBB templates and other budgeting tools.

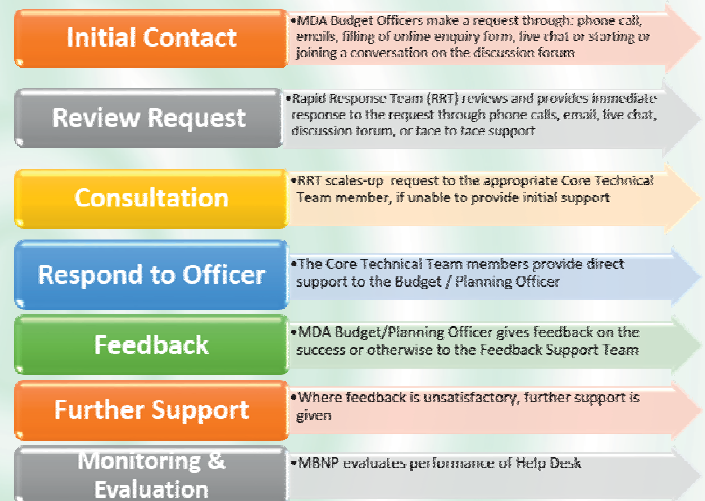
The BOF Help Desk was deployed in September 2016 with the support of United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID)-funded Partnership to Engage, Reform and Learn (PERL) to improve the budget preparation experience of MDAs' Budget and Planning Officers, by providing them with remote and real-time support, during the preparation process of their respective MDAs' budgets.

The BOF Help Desk is a problem-solving communication system which enables Budget Help Desk staff (known as the Rapid Response Team) to provide rapid support to their peers in the federal MDAs through a toll-free mobile telephony system or an online support system (email, live chat and discussion forum) accessible through the BOF Help Desk portal ([www.bofhelp.gov.ng](http://www.bofhelp.gov.ng)) within the Budget Office of the Federation website.

911 requests were received and resolved between September 14, 2016 and October 19, 2016.

### How the BOF Help Desk works

The BOF Help Desk support has six basic steps and a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) stage as shown in the illustration below:



The BOF Help Desk deployed simple tools and a system unique to the Budget Office of the Federation which allowed for flexibility, peer-to-peer learning and collaboration among the RRT members. The BOF Help Desk Manual, which outlines details of the Help Desk structure and tools, was developed by BOF to support the successful implementation of the Help Desk.

### Achievement

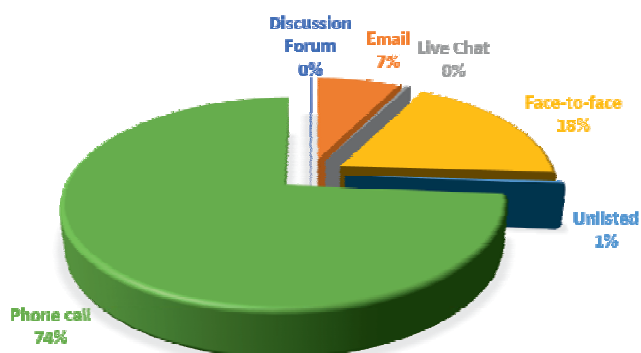
Between September 14, 2016 and October 19, 2016, the BOF Help Desk received and resolved 911 requests (as captured in the Master Request Log which aggregates content of individual Request Log used by the RRT members to collect information from budget and planning officers). 653 of the total requests were resolved by the RRT over the phone, through the online portal or face-to-face interactions, while the other requests which could not be resolved on the spot were escalated to Core Technical Team members (budget experts) attached to the Help Desk.

In addition to resolving budget requests, the BOF Help Desk enabled collaboration, learning and capacity building among the staff of the Budget Office of the Federation.

Below is a pie chart showing distribution of budget requests received through the different mediums.



Ben Akabueze - DG, BOF



## Feedback from Users of BOF Help Desk

The BOF Help Desk built a feedback system with the support provided to Budget and Planning Officers.

### Feedback through follow-up calls:

The follow up call to 273 beneficiaries indicated that all the MDA's Budget and Planning Officers were satisfied (partial or very satisfied).

### Feedback via Help Desk Portal:

32 MDA personnel (respondents) completed the feedback form on the BOF Help Desk Portal which aimed at tracking and documenting the responses of officers on the usefulness, courteousness and timeliness of the Help Desk. Analysis of the feedback showed that 56% of respondents said the Help Desk service was timely, 69% said it was courteous and 66% said it had the ability to resolve their issues.

In addition, individual comments show that most of the feedback was targeted at the budget preparation platform itself rather than the Help Desk

## Lessons

- **Staff dedication** - The Help Desk was successful because the RRT members (Help Desk staff) were self-motivated. They wanted to be part of what some called a "noble idea". RRT members spent hours personally studying the budget platform to be able to respond effectively to queries, stayed extra hours (sometimes till 9pm) to be able to catch up with and attend to requests, underwent peer-to-peer coaching, and used personal phones for follow up with MDAs' Planning and Budget Officers.
- **Personal interaction** - The telephony component of the Help Desk was used more often by MDAs' Budget and Planning Officers, who sometimes also preferred face-to-face conversations with a RRT member, when based in Abuja. Approximately 74 percent of the requests received by the RRT were through phone calls, 18 percent by face-to-face interaction and 7 percent through email.
- **Back-up Power Sources** - Provision of back-up power source was critical to the smooth running of the Help Desk.
- **Simple and flexible tools** - Deployment of simple familiar tools (Excel-based tools) and flexible protocol were critical to the successful administration of the Help Desk. The Google-based spreadsheet that was deployed for documentation of feedbacks and requests (Master Request Log) did not function optimally due to internet configuration.
- **A dedicated space is critical** - For effective operations of a Help Desk such as the BOF Help Desk, a ventilated, spacious and quiet place to work is critical. Noise reductions help with the quality of call, and a dedicated well-equipped space would afford RRT members the opportunity to hold face-to-face conversation with visiting MDAs' Planning and Budget

Medium	Number of Requests
Distribution Forum	1
Email	66
Live chat	3
Face-to-face	166
Unlisted	4
Phone calls	671
<b>Total Requests</b>	<b>911</b>

Total requests received between September 14, 2016 and October 17, 2016

- **Improved capacity and communication** - There is a need for improved communication on access to tools, as well as further training of MDA staff on ZBB preparation tools. 92 percent of requests made were focused on the web-based tool as information about access to the webbased platform / access control seemed to be unclear.
- **Added incentives** – In addition to self-motivation, incentives (including lunch and a performance honorarium) are critical to improving staff commitment as the Help Desk demands long working hours and additional duties.

## Recommendation on managing Help Desks in MDAs

- Help Desk staff should be trained on MDAs' core technical areas to improve their chances of solving requests without having to escalate to more-experienced core technical staff.
- The implementing organisation should develop a frequently asked questions (FAQ) guide that would guide the use of recurring tools (e.g. the web-based tool) by the MDAs.
- Specific MDA representatives should be trained on the platforms and tools used.
- The Help Desk should deploy alternative internet facilities independent of the parent institution's backbone, to ensure adequate online access.
- The implementing organisation should ensure adequate communication and awareness of the various assistance components of Help Desks to improve/increase usage.
- The implementing organisation should endeavour to adequately motivate Help Desk staff performance, particularly if the Help Desk duties are additional to their primary responsibilities.

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