

Consultant Terms of Reference

NetHope | Consultant, Emergency Response Connectivity Research

August, 2026

About NetHope

[NetHope](#) brings together leading humanitarian, development, and conservation organizations to create a more connected and equitable world through the power of technology. At the intersection of the nonprofit, private, and technology sectors, NetHope unites more than 60 Member organizations working in over 190 countries. In collaboration with over 70 of the world's top technology companies, we design innovative, scalable solutions to global challenges, helping our Members and the wider nonprofit sector better serve people and communities in need.

The Opportunity

The central focus of this research is examining how emergency connectivity technology support is currently structured and what are the remaining needs from frontline responders. Using existing literature and a case study methodology, this research aims to generate evidence on what “meaningful connectivity” looks like across emergency response scenarios/types today, and based on its findings, document already existing and provide recommendations for innovative structures in emergency connectivity support. This research also recognizes that meaningful connectivity cannot be understood or resourced in isolation from the broader humanitarian-development continuum. The organizations and communities at the center of this study operate not only in the acute phase of crisis, but across the full spectrum: before emergencies strike, during the response, and throughout the long recovery.

Scope of Work

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- Document how connectivity in emergency response has evolved and what it means in practice today across international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), local and national organizations, and affected communities, including the evolution of NetHope's work in this area.
- Examine the roles of the private sector in shaping connectivity resourcing models, and the ethical and technical implications associated with their adoption in the humanitarian sector.
- Document the connectivity technology needs of the frontline responders across international NGOs, local and national organizations, and affected communities and their change over the years.
- Document how the frontline responders across international NGOs, local and national organizations, and affected communities are currently covering their connectivity technology needs, and the existing gaps remaining.
- Assess existing funding models (e.g., pre-positioned equipment, cash grants, pre-approved procurement windows), including NetHope's models, and how they align with the needs of frontline responders.
- Analyze evidence from NetHope's emergency response program as embedded case studies of varying types and contexts of emergency connectivity resourcing.
- Produce actionable recommendations and evidence products for future emergency response programming at NetHope, and the broader humanitarian connectivity sector.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The central research question is:

How has connectivity in humanitarian emergency response evolved, and where does the sector stand in terms of achieving “meaningful connectivity” today?

Supporting questions:

- How do connectivity needs and constraints compare across international NGOs, local/national/regional NGOs, and community-based organizations?
- To what extent have preparedness and response investments reduced the duration and severity of connectivity loss during recent emergencies, compared to prior years?
- What specific technical, logistical, or funding barriers explain the persistence of last-mile gaps, even where broader country-level connectivity has improved?
- What funding and procurement models exist to support the work of frontline responders and the communities they serve, and what are the observed results?
- How do different support models (on-site technical support, in-kind donations, preparedness grants, response grants) perform across the preparedness, response, and recovery phases? Across conflict and post-conflict emergencies?
- What evidence from NetHope’s own programming shows which support models (on-site technical support, in-kind donations, preparedness grants, response grants) are most effective in which contexts, and where models may need to be combined rather than used in isolation?
- What role do private sector actors (donors and vendors) play in enabling or constraining this mix of models, and what tradeoffs come with relying on them?
- How can connectivity investment and technology be structured to better serve communities across the preparedness, response, and recovery phases of an emergency?
- How are internet shutdowns and restrictive government policies in the selected disaster-prone or at-risk case study locations reshaping connectivity strategies, and do locally driven models navigate these constraints more effectively than traditional approaches? (Case study locations will be selected jointly by the candidate and NetHope)

ACTIVITIES

The consultant will be responsible for the following activities:

1. Based on the existing research plan outline, build a research work plan and protocol:

- Building upon the existing research plan, the consultant will develop a research work plan and protocol, in agreement with the NetHope team.

2. Literature Review

- Conduct a structured review of existing research on connectivity technology in humanitarian work, digital infrastructure in crisis settings, and anticipatory humanitarian action.
- Analyze different support models, such as on-site technical support, in-kind donations, preparedness grants, response grants (e.g., OCHA, Start Network, IFRC Forecast-based Financing), as potential frameworks for emergency connectivity support.
- Review humanitarian-development nexus literature relevant to resilience-based connectivity investment.
- Review program documents from NetHope’s emergency response program.

- Analyze relevant policy documents (international and from the selected case-study countries), donor frameworks for emergency response and connectivity, and/or standard/most used MOU structures.

3. Stakeholder Mapping and Key Informant Interviews

- Map relevant stakeholders across six categories: international NGOs; local, national, and regional NGOs and CBOs; foundation/philanthropic organizations; private sector connectivity providers and donors; affected communities and local first responders; and relevant UN agencies and coordination bodies.
- Design and conduct semi-structured key informant interviews with representatives from each stakeholder group, with particular attention to lived experience of connectivity gaps, procurement barriers, successful experiences, and the meaning of “meaningful connectivity” in practice.
- Analyze and synthesize the qualitative data from the interviews.

4. Survey

- Design, pilot and deploy a quantitative survey (it can include qualitative sections to clarify quantitative results) for the NetHope Member network and NetHope Connected organizations, capturing data on connectivity needs, equipment procurement experiences, and effective support models.
- Analyze and report survey results as part of the overall research synthesis.

5. Data analysis and reporting

- Once the data collection and literature review is completed, the consultant will draft the final report, in close communication with the research committee.

6. Engagement with the NetHope research committee

- NetHope will establish a Research Committee to provide oversight, methodological guidance, and quality assurance throughout this assignment. The Research Committee will include representatives from NetHope’s emergency response team and the MEAL Specialist. The consultant will engage with this committee during the following stage of the research:
 - **Inception meeting:** joint review of the finalized research workplan, data collection tools, and ethical considerations.
 - **Mid-point review:** review of interim findings, and confirmation of workshop design and formats.
 - **Draft review:** structured feedback on the draft research report and evidence brief prior to finalization (a workshop might be necessary for this review).

7. Workshops

- Facilitate workshops with NetHope Member and Connected organizations and select local NGO partners to complement information from interviews and surveys and validate findings.
- Develop presentation and other supporting documents for a donor-facing workshop to present preliminary findings.

8. Case Studies

- Examine four NetHope emergency response initiatives as embedded case studies, documenting outcomes and evidence on the effectiveness of our implemented support models against specific emergency response contexts.

WORKING RELATIONSHIP

The consultant reports to NetHope’s MEAL Specialist. The MEAL Specialist will approve the outputs produced by the consultant.

Qualifications

Required

- Demonstrated experience conducting applied or policy-oriented research in humanitarian response, international development, or related fields.
- Strong qualitative research skills, including case studies, interview design, facilitation, and analysis; mixed-methods experience is an asset.
- Experience with survey design and quantitative data analysis.
- Familiarity with humanitarian connectivity, telecommunications infrastructure, or digital access in crisis settings.
- Familiarity with private sector connectivity providers and satellite communications technologies.
- Experience engaging with multi-stakeholder environments, including NGOs, private sector actors, and/or UN coordination bodies.
- Strong written communication skills, with the ability to produce accessible, evidence-based products for non-academic audiences.

Preferred

- Knowledge of anticipatory action frameworks and humanitarian funding architecture.
- Prior engagement with the NetHope Member network or similar organizations.

Project Timeline

Engagement period: 16th September, 2026 – 15th January, 2027

Estimated hours: 40 hours per month

Reporting to: MEAL Specialist

Additional detail:

Period	Phase	Key Activities	Deliverables/Outputs
September 2026	Inception	Confirm research structure; align with NetHope Research Committee on tools, methods, and workplan; finalize interview guides and survey instrument	• Research work plan and protocol • Interview guides • Survey instrument and other data collection tools
October 2026	Data Collection	Literature review; stakeholder mapping; key informant interviews; baseline data collection from NetHope's emergency response program; survey launch; finalize report outline	• Key informant interview notes • Database for baseline data collection • Summary of literature review • Report outline for approval

Period	Phase	Key Activities	Deliverables/Outputs
November 2026	Data analysis and drafting	Complete interviews and survey; analysis of results, and first drafting of the report, relevant validation workshops, co-design and donor-facing workshops	• First draft of the report • Data collection results: analyzed survey and raw data • Transcribed and analyzed interviews and recordings
December 2026	Final report, draft briefs, and dissemination	Final research report and recommendations; preparation of evidence brief; final review with NetHope Research Committee, donor facing workshop to share preliminary results	• Full research report with findings, analysis, policy recommendations, and recommendations for NetHope and nonprofits working in emergency response • Draft evidence brief: Targeted brief making the case for recommendations on NetHope's emergency response programming, grounded in research findings • Draft broader influence brief: Briefing on the research findings and recommendations
January 2027	Delivery of final products	Incorporate comments to briefs and final report (based on comments from the donor facing workshop)	• Evidence brief: Targeted brief making the case for recommendations on NetHope's emergency response programming, grounded in research findings • Broader influence brief: Briefing on the research findings and recommendations • Final report document with all relevant changes incorporated

Compensation

All payments are made in USD. Invoices should be submitted upon milestone completion and include a description of work completed during the period.

Selection Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated on the following criteria: relevant experience and track record; quality and clarity of proposed methodology and work plan; consultant qualifications and capacity; proposed rate (USD/hour) and overall value for investment; and references and past client satisfaction.

Selection Timeline

Proposal deadline: September 9th, 2026 (midnight ET); proposals will be reviewed on a rolling basis.

Review period: September 10th – September 14th, 2026

Engagement start: September 25th, 2026

Use of Artificial Intelligence

NetHope takes the responsible use of AI seriously. Selected candidates will be required to comply with NetHope's AI Policy, which governs the use of AI tools in the development of all deliverables, and to complete a brief AI Disclosure Form as part of the onboarding process prior to commencing work.

General Conditions

- We welcome qualified consultants from diverse backgrounds and locations globally.
- All contractors must pass an OFAC screening prior to engagement.
- All work product produced under this engagement is the property of NetHope.

How to Submit a Proposal

If this opportunity interests you, please submit your proposal [HERE](#) by September 9th, 2026 (mid-night ET). Your proposal should include:

- A brief overview of your relevant experience and approach
- A work plan and methodology for this engagement
- Your proposed rate in USD (hourly and total cost of the consultancy)
- Two to three references from similar engagements
- CV or professional profile

Due to the anticipated volume of submissions, NetHope reserves the right to review proposals and select a consultant prior to the closing date. Only those selected for further consideration will be contacted.

NetHope is an Equal Opportunity Employer.