USAID DIGITAL STRATEGY

USAID'S FIRST-EVER DIGITAL STRATEGY CHARTS AN AGENCY-WIDE VISION for development and humanitarian assistance in the world's rapidly evolving digital landscape.

THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION has given way to the promise of a digital world that spurs economic growth, improves health outcomes, and lifts millions out of poverty using new technologies and services. While digital tools present immense potential to advance freedom and transparency, generate shared prosperity, strengthen inclusion, and inspire innovation, it also presents significant risks to privacy and security through competing models of Internet freedom.

STRATEGY GOAL

To achieve and sustain open, secure, and inclusive digital ecosystems that contribute to broad-based, measurable development and humanitarian-assistance outcomes and increase self-reliance in emerging market countries.

The *Digital Strategy* includes two core, mutually reinforcing objectives:

> **DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM:** *stakeholders, systems, and enabling environments that together empower people and communities to use digital technology to gain access to services, engage with each other, or pursue economic opportunities.*

— RESPONSIBLY USE DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY —

OBJECTIVE 1

Improve measurable development and humanitarian-assistance outcomes through the responsible use of digital technology in USAID's programming

USAID   Partners

— STRENGTHEN DIGITAL ECOSYSTEMS —

OBJECTIVE 2

Strengthen openness, inclusiveness, and security of country digital ecosystems.

Civil Society   Partner Governments   Private Sector

To achieve the overall goal of the *Strategy*, these objectives will be executed through four tracks:

TRACK 1: ADOPT AN ECOSYSTEM APPROACH ▶ **Develop tools and resources** necessary to deliver development and humanitarian assistance effectively in a digital age

TRACK 2: HELP PARTNERS NAVIGATE RISK AND REWARDS ▶ **Build capacity of our partners** to navigate the unique opportunities and risks that digital technology presents across USAID's Program Cycle

TRACK 3: SHIFT TO "DIGITAL BY DEFAULT" ▶ **Support implementing partners** in adoption of digital operations

TRACK 4: BUILD THE USAID OF TOMORROW ▶ **Invest in our human capital** to guide the Agency through the digital age

HOW TO RESPONSIBLY INVEST IN DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

USAID's first ever Digital Strategy outlines a path to strengthen open, inclusive, and secure digital ecosystems in all partner countries, and calls on the Agency to "mandate the digital collection of programmatic data."

As the world responds to COVID-19, local institutions are receiving proposals intended to address challenges in health, education, and social services. The concepts often include technology, and range from simple to complex.

Digital tools are central to the COVID-19 response. Responders need detailed and timely data to understand and prevent the spread of the disease, and communities need access to accurate information in order to protect their families. Children are using digital technology to learn, people are using digital payments to send money to loved ones, and local institutions are entering the online space to deliver services that have been impacted by the epidemic. This requires strong digital tools, policies, and infrastructure to support the responsible use of technology and address inequalities.

YOU MAY BE ASKING:

- Should we fund an AI-based predictive disease modelling system?
- Should we pivot our programming to train educators through YouTube?
- Should we partner with the private sector to set up a call center for social services?
- Should we support the government to roll-out an app that ensures citizen compliance with quarantine orders?
- How can we expand our radio programming to address COVID-19?
- Is it worth piloting an e-Learning tool to support local education during COVID-19?

Here are **eight topics** to consider when assessing a proposal that includes a digital intervention. These tips are built on extensive USAID tools: the Digital Investment Tool, the Digital Health Investment Review Tool, and on lessons learned during the Ebola response. These are intended to support Missions, partners, and host country institutions to identify investments that achieve positive development outcomes.

1   **START WITH THE DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGE:** What is the specific local COVID-19 challenge we are trying to solve? Is a digital intervention beneficial? Ensure this is not a "solution" searching for a problem.

2   **ENSURE LOCAL OWNERSHIP & ENGAGE WITH RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS:** Is it important for host-country institutions to be able to manage the digital intervention? Would your intervention inadvertently displace the efforts of local actors? Building upon existing initiatives, using tools that are locally maintained, and incorporating local vendors, will lead to a greater chance of the system being used during and after the activity.

3   **ASSESS THE LANDSCAPE AND REUSE AND IMPROVE**: Is the digital intervention relevant to the local context? For example, if a digital tool requires data to be shared, but only 20% of clinics have connectivity, it may not be the best choice. Can the proposal be modified to reuse existing platforms that are already in place? How can local laws and protocols on technology and data be accomodated? Proposals that introduce new solutions need to reflect what's possible in the local context.

4   **DESIGN WITH THE USER**: How will users be consulted during the design process (ex. features, content, governance) when social distancing is emphasized? How can the system be adapted around users, rather than forcing users to accommodate (ex. what are users' existing media and communication preferences)? In an emergency, digital tools that are not intuitive will not be effective.

5   **ENSURE DATA PRIVACY & SECURITY**: How are we protecting data, especially sensitive data, during the response to COVID-19? Who owns and has access to the data being collected? Privacy is a right and protecting it can ensure trust. Consider potential privacy and security risks and mitigation efforts at every point in the data management lifecycle.

6   **IS THE TOTAL COST OF OWNERSHIP REALISTIC?** Does the system need to be affordable to local stakeholders? Does the budget include all necessary costs for the activity to quickly and successfully deploy to address COVID-19 (ex. system configuration, deployment, training, user testing, transaction, service, and licensing fees)? A resource mobilization plan can help activities last beyond donor funding.

7   **WILL IT SUSTAIN OR SCALE?** Could collaboration with local institutions, donors, and the private sector increase the possibility of scaling during and after the response to COVID-19? Many digital interventions don't survive past their pilot period. Defining a pathway to scale and ensure sustainability from the beginning can help an activity succeed.

8   **IS IT OPEN AND INTEROPERABLE?** Do current conditions warrant an open-source license, such an Open Data Commons or Creative Commons license? Is it important for the proposed solution to be interoperable with other locally used systems? During the Ebola response, siloed systems led to a fog of information that was difficult to see through.

OPPORTUNITIES

USAID programming can help support host country institutions assess technology proposals related to COVID-19 response and recovery. Speak with your counterparts to understand their technology procurement needs and capabilities and identify where USAID can provide support. USAID has additional mechanisms and technical support available for Missions. Please contact us for a consultation.

Resources and contact information

For more information on digital best practices, or to schedule a consultation on the Digital Investment Tool, please contact digitaldevelopment@usaid.gov.

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