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.
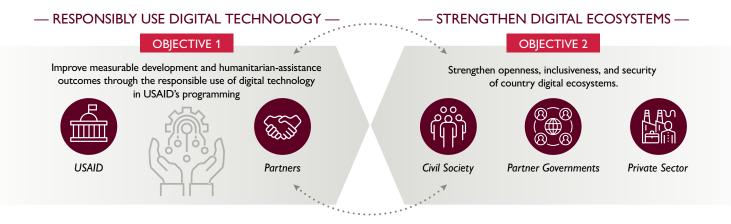
THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION has given way to the promise of a digital world that spurs economic growth, improves health outcomes, and lifts millions out of poverty using new technologies and services. While digital tools present immense potential to advance freedom and transparency, generate shared prosperity, 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.

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.*

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

— 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

DIGITAL LITERACY

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 "increase our efforts to improve digital literacy of all people to advance development."

DIGITAL LITERACY IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19 AND DEVELOPMENT

In light of physical constraints and concerns due to COVID-19, many countries are proactively embracing and exploring new options for advancing access to digital tools and resources to support work, education, and the delivery of important healthcare information. Digital literacy training and skills are crucial to facilitating this transition and to longer-term human capital investments in a country.

USAID aims to ensure equitable access to digital literacy skills and training, particularly for marginalized populations including women, persons with disabilities, and other underrepresented groups. These groups should be supported with safe and responsible access to the Internet and other digital technologies to receive, share, and produce content.

WHAT IS DIGITAL LITERACY?

Digital literacy skills are those necessary to, "access, manage, understand, integrate, communicate, evaluate, and create information safely and appropriately through digital devices and networked technologies for participation in economic and social life." There are two pillars of digital literacy: capacity and safety. Capacity is the hard skills people need to access the Internet and utilize a variety of digital platforms including computers, mobile devices, and other media (e.g, audio and video). Safety encompasses the soft skills of using digital tools safely, including online security, privacy, and information and media literacy.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR DIGITAL LITERACY IN COVID-19 RESPONSE PROGRAMMING

When designing digital literacy programs or working with external partners and stakeholders to implement digital literacy activities, please consider these guiding principles:

- **Strengthen the local ecosystem:** Support digital literacy and digital skills for digital employment/entrepreneurship by promoting local partners (civil society and private sector) that are already working to advance these skills. In doing so, be mindful of significant gender gaps in information, communications and technology (ICT) access and use, and work to overcome them.
- **Combat misinformation in health and COVID-19:** The importance of digital skills to distinguish between credible and accurate sources of news and information and misinformation.
- **Develop effective content:** Facilitate access to relevant digital literacy skills and training materials, promote local language digital literacy training materials, and support material development with locally relevant examples and case studies.
- **Accelerate innovative responses:** Those individuals with high digital literacy skills can design activities and produce new/re-tool digital apps (e.g, hackathons) that can support Covid-19 response, advocacy, and recovery efforts.

Questions to ask when designing a digital literacy program:

- Are you ensuring equitable access to digital literacy training, particularly to marginalized populations (e.g. women, persons with disabilities, rural communities)?

- Are you training and building upon existing infrastructure? For example, are you strengthening skills development that uses prevalent media (e.g., computers, Internet, mobile, audio, video)?

Questions to ask partners (private sector, governments, civil society and other stakeholders):

- How can digital literacy efforts better support your global/regional/national COVID-19 response?

- Is your activity duplicative and/or displacing the work of other institutions?

- Does your activity address and seek to overcome gaps in digital use and skills?

Similarly, there are risks and opportunities that can arise during a response to a global pandemic and need to be considered. Examples of risks and opportunities can include:

RISKS

The short-term digital literacy intervention inadvertently increases inequality and the digital divide, particularly among women and those with disabilities.

Immediate relevancy of your digital literacy intervention; digital literacy skills and training may not be accessible or important for short-term, as opposed to longer-term, response and recovery efforts.

OPPORTUNITIES

There is intense focus on the value and importance of using digital platforms in light of COVID-19 response and recovery to increase access to information which can help overcome physical distance challenges.

Forming deep, long-term partnerships and collaboration with a variety of organizations working in the global, national, and local digital literacy ecosystems.

Resources and contact information

For more information on digital literacy, please contact digitaldevelopment@usaid.gov.