



Refine and Implement Overview & FAQ

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Acronyms

A&A	Acquisition and Assistance
ADS	Automated Directives System
AO	Agreement Officer
AOR	Agreement Officer's Representative
BEO	Bureau Environmental Officer
BHA	Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance
FSSM	Food Security Support Mechanism
GAYA	Gender and Youth Award
HBMO	Humanitarian Business and Management Operations
HQ	Headquarters
IDEAL	Implementer-Led Design, Evidence, Analysis and Learning
IEE	Initial Environmental Examination
IP	Implementing Partner
IPTT	Indicator Performance Tracking Table
LogFrame	Logical Framework
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
PCS	Program Cycle Support
PRO-WASH	Practices, Research and Operations in Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
PREP	Pipeline and Resource Estimate Proposal
R&I	Refine and Implement
RFA	Request for Applications
RFSA	Resilience Food Security Activity
SBC	Social and Behavior Change
SCALE	Strengthening Capacity in Agriculture Livelihoods and Environment
SOW	Scope of Work
TOC	Theory of Change
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Background

Since FY 2016, the Office of Food for Peace — now merged with the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance to create the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) — has awarded most of its resilience food security activities (RFSAs) through a post-award co-creation process known as “*Refine and Implement*” (R&I). The purpose of R&I is to enable implementing partners (IPs) to improve collaboration, activity design and focus, fit to context, and implementation planning in partnership with BHA. The refinement period is usually about one calendar year, but may be adjusted for appropriateness and context. Importantly, the refinement period is *not* only designated for conducting studies or reviewing evidence. During the refinement period, IPs should also be carrying out all RFSA start-up work, including hiring staff and setting-up offices. IPs should also begin to implement the interventions that are known to work, that have a robust evidence-base, and are adapted to the operational context.

This overview is informed by the experiences of BHA staff and feedback from IPs. It outlines the major events, interactions, and deliverables that will be required for RFSAs during the refinement period and should be considered as guiding principles, not a standardized one-size-fits-all approach. This document is revised annually as BHA learns from R&I experience. Partners with prior R&I experience should expect differences in both the document and how R&I activities are managed.

This document is informational only, and does not change the terms and conditions of the award agreement. Activity management of RFSAs and the relationship of the IP and the Agreement Officer’s Representative (AOR) extends far beyond the information provided here. The actual events and associated requirements will be tailored to the needs of each activity, context, and IP; **specific details, particularly the timeline for events, are subject to change**. BHA will communicate actual requirements to the IP through the AOR. AORs are responsible to the Agreement Officer (AO) to manage approvals and changes within the bounds of applicable procurement law and to work with IPs and the BHA Office of Humanitarian Business and Management Operations (HBMO), Acquisition & Assistance (A&A) Division to do so.

Overview of the R&I Approach

The Refinement Period

During the refinement period, which typically lasts approximately 12 months, RFSAs will begin implementing interventions that are known to work and carry out a number of tasks according to the needs of the activity and IP, which may include:

- In collaboration with BHA and other relevant stakeholders, identify evidence and knowledge gaps in the activity theory of change (TOC).
- Carry out activities that contribute to the development of the RFSA's cross-cutting Social and Behavior Change (SBC) strategy.
- Pre-implementation formative research and analysis that addresses evidence and/or knowledge gaps, strengthens understanding of local context, and helps to prioritize RFSA interventions.
- Small-scale operational research and piloting implementation strategies.
- Start-up and implementation of proven implementation strategies that already have a robust evidence base and are adapted to the operational/cultural/other context(s).¹
- Meaningful community engagement to 1) enable two-way feedback and participation around the planned activity, interventions, and refinement period, 2) enhance understanding of local needs, opportunities, and aspirations; and 3) ensure mutual accountability, including in decision making processes.
- Participatory stakeholder engagement for strengthened local partnerships, capacity development, and coordination.
- Refining the TOC, logical framework, and implementation plans.
- Preparation for implementation through hiring, staff training, and procurement of goods and services.²

IPs, in consultation with BHA, will update and revise their foundational documents, including the TOC and implementation plans, throughout the refinement period as program staff mobilize and have access to a larger base of available evidence and learning. At the end of the refinement period, following the Culmination Workshop, IPs and BHA will agree on a revised set of foundational documents that will form the basis of implementation (and continued adaptation throughout the life of the activity).

Implementation

Although full implementation generally begins at the start of the activity's second year, implementation of proven strategies and pilots should begin as soon as possible after award. Additional implementation will be phased in throughout the refinement period and beyond, so there is no single point in time when refinement ends and implementation begins. The start of specific implementation strategies will be agreed

¹ Implementation of construction activities, at any stage in the life of the award, must align with [ADS 303maw](#) and [ADS 201maw](#) policies and requires concurrence from the AOR and BHA technical teams.

² Procurement or use of restricted goods (i.e., agricultural commodities, motor vehicles, pharmaceuticals, used equipment and fertilizer, including pesticides regulated under 22 CFR 216) have specific requirements that must be followed. BHA funding cannot be used to procure family planning commodities.

between the AOR and IP.

Throughout implementation, IPs will continue to use learning and adaptive management strategies to continuously improve program quality, close knowledge gaps, refine planning, test innovative approaches, update the theory of change, and continue stakeholder engagement and coordination with other relevant actors.

Figure 1: RFSA Life Cycle

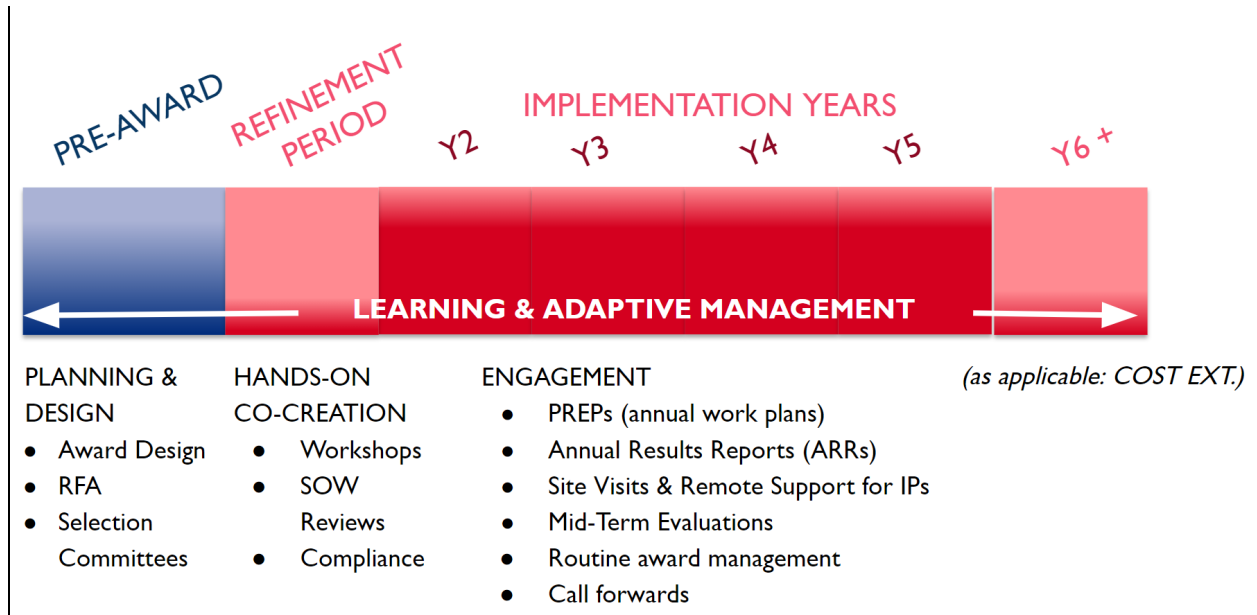


Figure 1 illustrates the RFSA life cycle, including co-creation that takes place during the refinement period and ongoing engagement that takes place during implementation.

Illustrative List of Events and Interactions for R&I RFSA

The events and interactions listed below are illustrative, and the suggested timing is based on a typical 12-month refinement period.

Post-Award Orientations and Kickoff Meeting

Shortly after the award is signed, USAID meets with each IP to review the sections of the award and to clarify the award requirements, roles and responsibilities and expectations. This meeting is not unique to R&I activities, but it is a best practice and an opportunity to review and discuss R&I principles, refinement period expectations and schedule, significant events and milestones, and roles and responsibilities.

A second post-award orientation/kickoff meeting is usually held in-country for IPs to establish working relationships with USAID staff. Together, USAID and IPs continue developing a common understanding of the R&I principles, events, schedule, roles and responsibilities, and implementation that can take place during year one. They also review any remaining issues that BHA raised at the application stage. USAID will support IPs in communicating the R&I model and any other priority messages to key host-country government actors as deemed helpful by the IPs.

Due to current COVID-19 related travel restrictions, it is anticipated that all post-award orientations will be conducted virtually for the foreseeable future. Depending on the needs of the IP and USAID, the orientation meetings may be combined and are subject to change.

- **Format:** Virtual meeting(s) with separate meeting(s) for each RFSA.
- **Attendees:** Staff from USAID and IPs headquarter (HQ) and field staff, including prime organizations and sub-awardees, as appropriate. USAID attendees may include BHA grants staff, BHA country and regional staff, other BHA Washington staff, and other USAID field staff.
- **Expected Deliverables and Outputs:** USAID and the IP will gain a mutual understanding of all award terms and conditions and roles and responsibilities under the R&I model. The meeting will also establish clear lines of communication and clarify the timeline for refinement period events.
- **Location:** Remote.
- **Timing:** First meeting within the first weeks of the award.

Pre-Inception Technical Assistance

IPs will receive and may seek technical assistance to lay the groundwork for a successful refinement period and begin preparing for R&I events.

- **Format:** Series of remote meetings.
- **Attendees:** IP field and HQ staff; USAID technical staff; BHA food security support mechanisms (FSSMs, such as PCS, GAYA, Advancing Nutrition, PRO-WASH, SCALE, IDEAL, etc).
- **Purpose:** Help IPs prepare, as needed, for the Gender Consultation, Inception Workshop, and other refinement period activities.
- **Expected Deliverables and Outputs:** Initial revisions to the TOC; initial list of evidence and knowledge gaps; initial list of priority behaviors³ to inform the SBC strategy, IP staff prepared to take lead roles at forthcoming workshops.
- **Location:** Remote.
- **Timing:** Approximately one-two months after award.

³ Prior to the inception workshop, partners should propose a draft list of priority behaviors that the project will address across the TOC. BHA suggests IPs to limit to a manageable number of behaviors per purpose.

Gender Consultation

The purpose of the consultation is to establish a shared understanding of gender analysis and integration requirements, and to ensure gender, age, and social inclusion considerations are integrated in the activity design through enhanced technical support.

Part 1 of the consultation will include a) an overview of USAID and BHA requirements and expectations with regard to gender analysis and integration in RFSA; b) discussion on the importance of gender to achieve food security; and c) identification of the key gender, age, and social inclusion issues that could obstruct or facilitate progress towards achieving the intended results along the project theory of change. During part 2, IPs will develop a tailored gender analysis scope of work based on the key gender, youth, and social dynamics issues identified that aligns with the project theory of change.

- **Format:** Series of online engagements held in two parts with all RFSA IPs within a country.
- **Attendees:**
 - Part 1: IP senior management, gender advisors, senior-level activity leads/technical advisors, and field staff; BHA country and regional staff, BHA Washington staff, and other USAID field staff as needed; BHA support mechanisms
 - Part 2: IP's dedicated gender technical advisors and senior management working on the activity's TOC and gender analysis SOW; BHA and support mechanism staff who focus on gender, age and social inclusion issues
- **Expected Deliverables and Outputs:** Enhanced understanding of gender analysis and integration requirements and a draft gender analysis SOW.
- **Location:** Remote.
- **Timing:** Approximately three months after award.

BHA Team Field Visit (Optional)

If the necessary travel is possible, USAID field and Washington-based personnel will visit the activity areas to better understand the technical and operational context, issues, and opportunities prior to the R&I Inception Workshop.

- **Format:** Duration and scope of visit may vary by country. Typically one week long.
- **Attendees:** BHA country and regional staff, BHA Washington staff, and other USAID field technical staff, as needed, will participate. The field visit is organized by BHA and is not meant to interfere with IP operations. However, IP staff should plan to spend time meeting with USAID staff during the field visit.
- **Expected Deliverables and Outputs:** The BHA team will come away with a better understanding of the operating environment and programmatic challenges that will prepare them to fully participate in the R&I Inception Workshop and contribute to the TOC review sessions.
- **Location:** If possible, in-country implementation areas.
- **Timing:** Usually held the week before the R&I Inception Workshop.

R&I Inception Workshop

During the Inception Workshop, IPs and USAID develop a shared understanding of expectations, roles and responsibilities, milestones, and deliverables to be completed during the refinement period. IPs and USAID review and discuss the TOC and knowledge gaps identified prior to the workshop; refine formative and implementation research plans; gain common understanding of community and stakeholder engagement strategies; explore capacity development plans; and build working relationships to facilitate future collaboration.

- **Format:** A series of online engagements with USAID and IP staff (both prime and sub-awardees). Ideally, some sessions involve all IPs within a country to enhance collaboration and coordination. Other sessions will address RFSA-specific and sector-specific (e.g. WASH or nutrition) work.
- **Attendees:** BHA country and regional staff, BHA Washington staff, and other USAID field staff; IP HQ and regional staff (both prime and sub-awardees) and RFSA field staff including management and representatives of technical sectors and sub-sectors; Representatives from BHA support mechanisms and other activities with which BHA expects strong collaboration, such as other USAID IPs in the areas of operation.
- **Expected Deliverables and Outputs:**
 - USAID and each IP agree upon primary research questions to guide formative and implementation research during the refinement period.
 - Specific research methods, stakeholder engagement priorities, and community engagement planning may be agreed upon by the end of the workshop.
 - To inform the SBC strategy, IPs will finalize a list of priority behaviors across the purposes of the TOC and begin to identify SBC-related knowledge gaps.
 - After the workshop, IPs will finalize their research statements of work and stakeholder engagement plan based on workshop proceedings. (Note: BHA does not require IPs to use any specific research or stakeholder engagement methods. Methods must contribute to addressing agreed-upon knowledge gaps for the refinement period that BHA and RFSA staff prioritized during the R&I Inception Workshop.)
 - The final refinement period work plan will be completed following the workshop and will include a) formative and implementation research plan; b) stakeholder and capacity development plan; and c) staff development plan. See “Refinement Period Deliverables” section below for details.
- **Location:** Remote.
- **Timing:** Approximately three months after award.

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Workshop

An interactive workshop convened by BHA to deliver and improve IP understanding of BHA M&E and reporting requirements, including what should be included in the M&E Plan. The BHA M&E team will give a general orientation to BHA M&E policies and

guidelines; provide specific instructions on how to prepare and submit all components of the M&E Plan; and participate in consultative/collaborative meetings with each RFSA and/or technical teams within each RFSA. BHA and the evaluation partner will also organize separate discussion and/ or workshops to develop the evaluation methods, and coordinate the design, timing, and scope of the evaluation. BHA may design a performance evaluation or an impact evaluation using experimental or quasi-experimental methods.

- **Format:** BHA M&E staff convene a series of engagements with all IPs in a country, including plenary sessions and individualized technical support sessions.
- **Attendees:** IP participants from prime and sub-awardees will include senior-level activity management and technical advisors, including M&E, learning, and research leads; IP regional and/or HQ M&E advisors and/or technical managers. USAID attendees will include BHA country and regional staff (as appropriate) and BHA Washington and/or regional M&E staff. Staff from BHA support mechanisms may also attend as appropriate.
- **Expected Deliverables and Outputs:** IPs have a clear understanding of USAID's expectations for the M&E Plan submission; IPs have a clear understanding of how to refine and resubmit the TOC over the life of the award, and how to select quantitative indicators and qualitative inquiries that will comprise the LogFrame; IPs can begin setting preliminary targets for quantitative indicators in the indicator performance tracking table (IPTT); IPs can begin adapting BHA indicator performance indicator reference sheets (PIRSs) and creating PIRS for custom quantitative indicators and Qualitative Inquiry Planning Sheets (QuIPS) for qualitative inquiries; and IPs have a clear understanding of how to set up activity databases/management information systems (MIS) and share data with other RFSA's and/or local entities, when appropriate.
- **Location:** Remote.
- **Timing:** Approximately month four.

M&E Technical Assistance

Staff from BHA's M&E team provide direct technical assistance to IPs.

- **Format:** One-on-one engagement and/or technical consultations.
- **Attendees:** IP staff and BHA M&E staff.
- **Purpose:** Direct technical assistance to partners on M&E related topics, such as preparation and/or revision of the M&E Plan; and advising on alignment of the activity targets (i.e., in the IPTT) with the Detailed Implementation Plan (DIP), which is part of the Year Two *Pipeline and Resource Estimate Proposal (PREP) submission*.
- **Location:** Remote.
- **Timing:** Throughout the refinement period.

Pre-Culmination Technical Assistance

In preparation for the Culmination Workshop, partners with support from PCS, will begin assembling proposed refinements to the TOC on the basis of refinement period findings, articulating the implications of findings, and prioritizing interventions.

- **Format:** three - four days in person or a series of remote meetings.
- **Attendees:** IP field and headquarter staff; BHA support mechanisms.
- **Purpose:** Help IP staff prepare for the Culmination Workshop.
- **Expected Deliverables and Outputs:** Summary of refinement period findings and proposed activity design adjustments for reference during the Culmination Workshop; IP staff prepared to take lead roles at forthcoming workshops.
- **Location:** TBD, in country or remote.
- **Timing:** Approximately ten to twelve months after award.

R&I Culmination Workshop and Chief of Party Presentations

This workshop is the culminating event for the refinement period. USAID and IPs come together to discuss how learning from completed assessments, baseline data results, stakeholder consultations, community engagement, pilots, and other key findings have been and will continue to be used to evaluate, validate, and refine their activity design and implementation plans (including approaches initiated during the refinement period).

- **Format:** Three-day workshop or series of online engagements with all IPs, potentially followed by additional time for demand-driven technical sessions.
- **Attendees:** IP participants should include field, regional and HQ staff representing each prime and their sub-awardees. USAID participants should include BHA country and regional staff, BHA Washington staff, and other USAID field staff as needed. BHA support mechanisms will also participate.
- **Expected Deliverables and Outputs:** Agreement on proposed adaptations to activity design and implementation approaches; remaining knowledge gaps identified with plans for ongoing learning, knowledge sharing and adaptation.
- **Location:** TBD, In country/region or remote.
- **Timing:** Within one to two months of the end of the refinement period.

Refinement Period Deliverables

The information below supplements the RFSA award, providing additional detail about deliverables that are critical to the R&I approach. IPs should refer to their awards for a full list of required deliverables.

Refinement Period Work Plan

The refinement period work plan will summarize the IP's main tasks (both related to R&I and typical activity start-up) to ensure that this period will be useful, effective, and impactful.

- **Format:** The IP and AOR will agree on a format for the refinement period work plan, which will reflect the requirements outlined below on formative and implementation

research; community engagement; stakeholder engagement and capacity development; and staff development.

- **Timeline:** To be determined by the AOR. Generally, a draft work plan is due prior to the R&I Inception Workshop and a final work plan is due 21 days following the conclusion of the workshop.
- **Submission and Approval:** The draft and final work plans will be submitted to the AOR, who is responsible for reviewing and approving.

The AOR will work with IPs to determine the exact content and format of the refinement period work plan, which will include information on the following:

- **Formative and Implementation Research**

The work plan should describe the topics the IP plans to investigate during the refinement period. These topics should build upon the TOC and Activity Learning Plan submitted at the application stage and address the priority evidence and knowledge gaps identified during the Inception Workshop. The work plan may include detail about each proposed topic or research question, appropriate research methods (or considerations when determining research methods) to answer each question, and a staffing plan with position requirements. Information on formative and implementation research will align to the research statements of work and be revised during the R&I Inception Workshop.

- **Community Engagement**

The IP should utilize highly participatory processes that give a wide range of participants the opportunity to identify local resources, express their priorities, and provide input into activity designs and planned interventions. Ideally, a wide range of participants become active collaborators, fully engaged in the activity and empowered contributors that help improve the programs and increase the likelihood of sustainable outcomes. As such, Community Engagement under RFSAs can be considered as a range of processes implemented throughout the life of the activity that incorporate the interests, concerns, information, and capacities of affected stakeholders in decisions and actions related to their own community development. BHA will provide technical support during the R&I Inception Workshop through Community Engagement Roundtables that provide space for IPs to consider planning related to implementing community engagement approaches.

- **Stakeholder Engagement and Capacity Development**

Also building upon the Activity Learning Plan, the work plan should describe how IPs will engage and develop the capacity of local partners, local government, other donor-funded activities, and other key actors. IPs should use the refinement period

to better understand the local systems of existing stakeholders, policies, and institutional dynamics to inform the planning. Engagement and capacity development of these stakeholders helps to align RFSA activities with national and local efforts and build sustainable approaches. The work plan may include overarching objectives, stakeholders to be engaged, methods of engagement and capacity development, a staffing plan with position requirements, and a list of tasks with a timeline for completion.

- **Staff Development**

In the work plan, IPs should describe how they will engage staff on TOC reviews and examinations, discussions to understand the most critical questions and learning priorities, formative and implementation research, and community engagement. During the refinement period IPs shall assess staff capacity needs and provide capacity strengthening in specific competency areas (e.g., SBC, nutrition, agriculture, livelihoods, WASH, environmental compliance, etc.) and over-arching community development approaches such as community engagement processes and adult learning methods. The IP must present a cogent and comprehensive approach for building staff knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Formative and Implementation Research Statements of Work

A separate SOW is required for each research topic described in the Formative and Implementation Research Plan (described above). IPs are encouraged to include long-term activity staff on research teams to help carry out research activities. SOWs should follow the BHA template and include the following information:

1. research objectives and justification
2. research methods and justification
3. research team composition, including qualifications, roles and responsibilities
4. research schedule
5. data collection and analysis methods
6. CVs of proposed individuals to lead the research

- **Format:** SOW Template
- **Timeline:** Some SOWs might be drafted prior to the Inception Workshop. Most SOWs will be developed as an output of the Inception Workshop. Others may be developed throughout the refinement period and implementation, as knowledge gaps arise.
- **Submission and Approval:** SOWs for all assessments/studies, whether conducted internally or contracted out, must be submitted to BHA for technical review and feedback. In addition, the AOR, in consultation with the AO, will determine which of these SOWs also requires formal approval from the AO or AOR.

Formative and Implementation Research Reports

Specific reporting requirements for each formative and implementation research investigation will be agreed upon by USAID and the IP post-award.

- **Format:** Reports should be limited to 25 pages (excluding appendices) and prioritize main findings, learning, and potential use and application to the BHA activities.
- **Timeline:** Whenever possible, reports should be completed and approved as activity deliverables before the Culmination Workshop. The specific due date for each report will be agreed between the IP and USAID.
- **Submission and Approval:** AOR

Overview of Refinement Period Learning

This report will be submitted at the end of the refinement period to synthesize what has been learned from formative research, community engagement, stakeholder engagement, capacity development, and staff development. The report should prioritize communication of main findings, learning, and potential use and application to the RFSA. As most IPs will develop an SBC strategy, the report should describe how findings will be used to contribute to the strategy.⁴

- **Format:** The AOR will work with IPs to determine the content and format of the report
- **Timeline:** All reports should be completed and approved before the Culmination Workshop, with a specific due date for each report agreed between the IP and USAID.
- **Submission and Approval:** AOR

Year Two Work Planning

Refinement period activities often warrant substantial changes to the scope of RFSA activities. Therefore, requirements for the Year Two planning documents in R&I RFSAs will be different than those outlined in the standard PREP guidance (which will be followed in subsequent years). BHA will share specific requirements as soon as possible after award.

- **Format:** USAID will provide instructions.
- **Timeline:** Per the terms of the award
- **Submission and Approval:** AOR and AO, as needed

Chief of Party Presentation

The presentation will be delivered as part of the Culmination Workshop. It should primarily focus on how the refinement period has informed the technical approaches and activity design going forward; the scope, format and content will be agreed in advance between the IP and AOR, with support from PCS.

- **Submission and Approval:** AOR

⁴ Although not considered a refinement period deliverable, the first draft of the SBC strategy should be submitted to BHA with the year 2 PREP. Partners are encouraged to meet with BHA at any time in the process.

FAQ

Frequently Asked Questions

The R&I Approach

This document is intended to provide general information about the Refine and Implement (R&I) approach used for Resilience Food Security Activities (RFSAs) supported by the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA). Although this document is meant for planning purposes, and to better explain the approach, it is ancillary to the award agreement and direction from the Agreement Officer's Representative (AOR), which will be tailored to fit the specific context and circumstances. Activity management of RFSAs and the relationship of the partner and the AOR extends beyond the information provided here and is subject to the terms and conditions of the award.

1. What is Refine and Implement?

Refine and Implement (R&I) is a co-creation approach for resilience food security activities (RFSAs) supported by the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA). The approach has a refinement period prior to full implementation of an award. Roughly the first year of a five-year award is the refinement period. During the refinement period, implementing partners (IPs) refine the activity design based on evidence and stakeholder input, invest in staff development, and tailor implementation strategies to the local norms and context. Start-up and implementation of proven interventions that have a robust evidence-base and are adapted to the operational/cultural/other context(s) also occurs during the refinement period.

2. What are the benefits of the Refine and Implement Approach?

The R&I approach is meant to contribute to evidence-based, effective activity design resulting in substantially higher food- and nutrition-security gains. By introducing a designated refinement period, the activity design can more comprehensively consider the priorities of the communities, operating environment, contextual factors, capacities of local institutions and service providers, and other investments in the target area.

The Refinement Period

3. What happens during the refinement period?

During the refinement period, IPs refine their activities' theory of change (TOC) and interventions in close collaboration with BHA staff based on the baseline data; community priorities, needs and capacities; institutional mapping; outreach to public and private service providers, institutions and governance structures; assessments and studies; and formative and implementation research. They also prepare for implementation through hiring, staff training, and procurement of goods and services.⁵ While application of evidence-based interventions is encouraged in the refinement period, the majority of implementation begins in the

⁵ Procurement of restricted goods (i.e., agricultural commodities, motor vehicles, pharmaceuticals, pesticides, used equipment and fertilizer) have specific requirements that must be followed. BHA funding cannot be used to procure family planning commodities.

implementation period. Learning and adaptive management continue throughout the life of the award.

4. When will the Baseline data be collected and by whom?

A baseline study is required for all RFSAs. Baseline data to be used for evaluation is collected during the first year of the award before significant implementation has begun. This is managed by BHA and conducted by an external firm or organization. BHA intends to design evaluations as impact evaluations or using quasi-experimental designs. IPs, Mission, and BHA Washington should plan to collaborate with the evaluation team to design a meaningful evaluation during the refinement period. Detailed information about evaluations in the RFSA program cycle can be found in Chapter 4 of the [Guidance for Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting for Resilience Food Security Activities](#) and further guidance and collaboration will be available through the M&E Advisor.

5. How will an IP identify which assessments and/or studies to conduct?

IPs, BHA, and the Mission will collaboratively decide on the number and types of studies and assessments to complete during the refinement period.⁶ Before the Inception Workshop, the IP will analyze activity needs and evidence gaps and engage relevant stakeholders to validate and build on the proposal-stage activity learning plan. During the Inception Workshop, IPs, BHA country and regional staff, BHA Washington staff, and other USAID field staff will discuss information/knowledge gaps, research questions, planned implementation strategies, and pilot studies. If time allows, they will also discuss the methodologies and methods proposed by the IPs to carry out any research studies, conduct pilot studies, and/or monitor implementation of proven strategies that will begin during the refinement period. After the workshop, IPs will finalize and submit SOWs for proposed assessments and/or studies to the AOR for approval.

6. What is the role of Social and Behavior Change (SBC) in RFSA programming, and how does it relate to Refine and Implement?

SBC is the systematic application of iterative, theory-based, and research-driven processes and strategies for change at the individual, community, and society levels. BHA recognizes that SBC cuts across all sectors. It is a best practice for RFSAs to develop a cross-cutting SBC strategy which will be informed by many R&I activities. Prior to the inception workshop IPs will propose a list of priority behaviors across the purposes of the TOC. During the inception workshop, partners will begin to identify SBC-related knowledge gaps based on a thorough understanding of the context and project goals. While developing the R&I plan, IPs should consider activities that will contribute to the SBC strategy, including but not limited to formative research (qualitative or mixed-methods), pilot tests or studies, community consultations, participatory design approaches, desk reviews, and process evaluations. Any primary research activities must be participatory, and results from research and learning activities should be validated with participants. IPs should also take advantage of the findings generated by the gender analysis to inform the SBC strategy, and design any SBC-focused R&I research or learning initiatives with the aim of complementing, rather than duplicating, the gender analysis. At the culmination

⁶ Must include assessments required by BHA outlined in the award, such as the Initial Environmental Examination, Climate Screening and Gender Assessment.

workshop, IPs will share with BHA their description of their understanding of the SBC-related knowledge gaps and incorporate them into the TOC, which will ultimately inform the SBC strategy. IPs should develop the SBC strategy by the end of year one to be submitted with the Year 2 PREP.

7. Who carries out these assessments and/or studies?

IPs may hire specialist consultants to help design and lead assessments and studies with support from activity and HQ staff. Whenever possible, qualified local consultants should be considered, and activity staff should be actively involved in planning, data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the findings. This will help the staff to own the information as well as the process; they will intimately learn the topics and enhance their capacity to conduct future studies. Implementing partners should anticipate and budget for staff participation in conducting assessments and studies. The IP is responsible for contracting any required consultants and obtaining Agreement Officer (AO) sub-award prior approvals from BHA as necessary.

8. Can an IP use an internal expert or team to conduct an assessment or study?

Yes. In BHA's experience, however, it is difficult for internal staff (field or HQ) to complete the work in the short time frame required given their other responsibilities. BHA recommends that IPs plan and budget for each study/assessment to have a dedicated team lead.

9. Does BHA review and approve SOWs for all assessments/studies?

Statements of Work (SOWs) for all assessments/studies, whether conducted internally or contracted out, must be submitted to BHA for technical review and feedback. The AOR, in consultation with the AO, will determine which SOWs also require formal approval from the AO or AOR.

10. What is the role of BHA during the refinement period?

BHA supports IPs as they work to improve the quality of their activity design and implementation plans. At strategic points throughout the refinement period, BHA staff will review plans and SOWs and provide technical input and assistance. BHA will also convene a series of events during the refinement period to provide input, promote knowledge sharing, and enhance collaboration between BHA, IPs, and other stakeholders. The exact events and timeline will be determined according to the needs of each award, but illustrative information is available in the RFA and the R&I Overview for Implementing Partners.

11. What is the role of the Mission during the refinement period?

Local BHA and other Mission staff bring invaluable knowledge and experience to the refinement period. Local BHA staff and, if desired, other Mission staff will participate in the events and activities mentioned above.

12. Should IPs hire all staff during the refinement period?

Most staff, in particular sector technical leads and core implementation staff, should be hired early in the refinement period so they can lead and participate in refinement period activities and

events. However, if the award has a commodity distribution component, the IP may decide to hire the commodity management staff toward the end of the refinement period in preparation for the arrival of the commodities.

13. Can IPs implement activity interventions during the refinement period?

Yes. Small-scale operational research, piloting implementation strategies, responses to urgent needs, and start-up of proven, evidence-based implementation strategies are encouraged during the refinement period. Proposed research and interventions should be clearly articulated in planning documents and are subject to AOR agreement.

14. What are BHA's expectations regarding community engagement?

There is no single definition for community engagement, as it can be used to meet different program objectives, ranging from mobilization or improvements to service delivery, to participatory methods for collecting data and information. Under RFSA projects, a local/community governance lens is also applied where community engagement is used to enhance local ownership and sustainability of the project. Under this lens, community engagement encompasses a range of processes implemented throughout the life-of-activity, incorporating the interests, concerns, information, and capacities of stakeholders' decisions and actions related to their own community development.

Overall, meaningful community engagement includes approaches to 1) enable two-way feedback and participation around the planned activity, interventions, and refinement period, 2) enhance understanding of local needs, opportunities, and aspirations; and 3) ensure mutual accountability, including in decision-making processes. Community engagement activities should continue beyond the refinement period, but initial analyses of community priorities and solutions should be taken into account to improve the project's TOC. IPs will have opportunities to engage on community engagement topics with BHA and each other during the refinement period, including the Community Engagement Roundtable sessions during the Inception Workshop.

15. How many changes are expected/allowed to the TOC during the refinement period?

There is no set number of expected or allowed changes to the TOC based on the refinement period activities and events. The goal of the RFSA cannot usually be changed, as that would change the scope of the award. However, R&I is an opportunity to add, remove, or replace interventions to enhance focus and improve results. USAID and the IP will come to agreement on TOC modifications during the Culmination Workshop at the end of the refinement period. In some cases, the process may involve follow-up technical assistance by BHA's M&E staff and support mechanisms immediately following the Culmination Workshop. The revised TOC is approved by the BHA M&E Team and AOR, and the M&E Plan is submitted as part of the Year 2 PREP process. Refinement happens throughout the award to continually improve activity design in order to provide the highest quality programming to participants. BHA recommends submitting TOC revisions with the PREP, but IP's may submit TOC changes at any point during the award, if needed. Changes to the TOC must be approved by the AOR.

16. What is the role of the environmental impact assessment and climate risk management during the refinement period?

During the refinement year, IPs revise their TOCs and interventions. During this time, IPs are to begin developing the environmental compliance and climate risk analyses to help ensure that TOCs are risk-informed. As a result, finalizing environmental documents may not occur until the end of the refinement period when activities and risks are well-understood. The refinement period is a good time for IPs to engage with the Bureau Environmental Officer (BEO) and clarify any questions about USAID's environmental impact assessment procedures (environmental compliance) and climate risk management. IPs will finalize and submit the Initial Environmental Examination (IEE) toward the end of the R&I period, and submit other environmental documents (as required) for BEO approval recognizing that revisions and amendments to compliance documents may occur over the life of the award. On a case-by-case basis, Scoping Statements and Environmental Assessments may take place during the refinement period for activities that are well-understood to be "High Risk" (e.g., irrigation, roads, work in sensitive ecosystems such as Ramsar wetlands and protected areas). The BEO may also engage IPs during the R&I and/or M&E workshop to provide further guidance. Further information on environmental compliance can be found here: <https://www.usaid.gov/environmental-procedures>.

The Implementation Period and Extensions

17. What are BHA's expectations for the implementation period?

The implementation period will typically cover approximately years two through five of the award. In practice, however, there is no single point in time when refinement ends and implementation begins. Learning and adaptive management will continue throughout the life of the award. In addition, IPs often begin small-scale operational research, piloting implementation strategies, and start-up of proven, evidence-based implementation strategies during the refinement period. The start of specific implementation strategies will be agreed between the IP and AOR.

18. When is the first Pipeline Resource Estimate Proposal (PREP) due?

Refinement period activities often warrant substantial changes to the scope of RFSA activities. Therefore, requirements for the Year Two planning documents in R&I RFSA's will be different than those outlined in the standard PREP guidance. BHA will share specific requirements as soon as possible after award. In subsequent years, IPs will follow the standard PREP guidance.

19. When do awardees submit a call forward?

The AOR and the IP will jointly identify the timing of the first call forward to ensure that commodities are in the IPs warehouse for distribution when they are needed (normally the start of year two).

20. Under what circumstances will BHA consider an extension?

An externally-led evaluation will be completed toward the end of the RFSA, which is generally referred to as the “interim/final evaluation.”⁷ The evaluation approach may vary based on context and will be adjusted to fit the programming needs of a given country. BHA will consider, based on the availability of funding, and other considerations, extending the RFSA for up to five additional years if the evaluation (and other BHA-led monitoring visits) find the activity has been exceptionally high performing and has substantial potential to make a larger contribution to BHA goals in the extension period. BHA defines exceptional high-performing activities as those that have made substantial progress in key food security and nutrition security outcomes and have established foundations of sustainability reflecting context specific factors to enhance motivation, capacity, linkages, and access to resources. These would include, for example, activities to strengthen systems of social accountability and the institutional environment, as well as strengthened service delivery systems to sustain outcomes. Any extension beyond the initial five-year award is subject to the Determination to Restrict Eligibility (DRE) approval process in USAID Automated Directives System (ADS) 303.

21. What does BHA require from IPs for an extension?

At a minimum BHA requires extension plans, budgets, revised targets, and possibly a few new indicators. In addition, extensions will be subject to availability of funds and commodities, along with approval by USAID.

22. What happens to activities that are not exceptionally high performing?

If activities perform moderately or below what was envisioned — and/or gains are linked only to unsustainable program inputs — BHA will maintain their original end dates. Close-out plans for these activities will be due as indicated in the award. Note that any poorly-performing activity may be terminated at any time at the discretion of the AO.

23. Will activities continue the same set of interventions in the extension period?

BHA expects that extended activities will substantially revise the overarching technical approach during the extension period. The extension period should focus on reinforcing development gains and investing in the sustainability of outcomes and necessary services (e.g., by transitioning ownership of key systems/services to local entities such as government and private sector).

⁷ This evaluation, typically conducted in the fourth year, will serve as the activity’s final evaluation if no cost extension is awarded; it will serve as an “interim” evaluation if a cost extension is awarded.