PREPARING USAID PROGRESS REPORTS

FEBRUARY 2021

SLIDE 1: Welcome to Our Training Series

Welcome to the "Preparing Progress Reports" module of the "How to Work with USAID" training series.

SLIDE 2: Learning Objectives

This module is for organizations with limited or no experience working with USAID. It can also strengthen your activity documentation and reporting practices.

In this module, you will:
- Learn how reporting supports good activity management;
- Understand what should be in a progress report.
- Learn best practices for preparing reports; and
- Discover how reporting is key to your relationship with USAID.

SLIDE 3: Why Progress Reporting Is Important

USAID requires awardees and implementing partners to submit progress reports quarterly, semiannually, or annually. Ask your AOR, or Agreement Officer's Representative, or your COR, or Contracting Officer's Representative, to confirm when to submit reports.
- Effective progress reporting documents how you're doing against annual work plans and budgets, and identifies needed adjustments.
- It provides details on outputs, outcomes, and lessons learned during an activity's life cycle, and aids with future program planning.
- Reports deliver useful information to USAID and your partners so they can tell your activity's story for communications and marketing.
- And you support USAID's documentation of results of funded programs, as well as learning and adapting for strategic planning.

Strong reporting helps partners be accountable and transparent for the Agency, the communities where you work, and your stakeholders.

SLIDE 4: Reporting Shows Progress

Through regular reporting, you review progress and have a structure to share important work plan information with USAID.

Plus, through periodic reviews, you can analyze spending for alignment with actions and outputs. You can also identify issues so you can adjust your plan.

Reports document challenges and responses you have discussed with USAID. Just be sure to talk about issues or changes with your AOR or COR before you include them in your report.

Reports are valuable beyond the activity period. USAID collects progress reports and other resources in its Development Experience Clearinghouse, or "DEC" [pronounced "DECK"]. Ask your AOR or COR if you should submit your reports to the DEC. By the way, anyone can access this online library.

SLIDE 5: Reporting Shows Progress

Progress reports should document outputs, outcomes, and lessons learned. You should organize information in a format that is easy to share.

Your AOR or COR can help you determine format and content, including stories and photos. They can also help identify additional uses, such as sharing results with community leaders or the government.

Here's a tip: After you submit a report, start planning for your next one.

SLIDE 6: Progress Report Requirements (DIVIDER SLIDE)

In this section, we will outline key elements of a USAID progress report.

SLIDE 7: Templates

Reporting requirements vary from award to award. They are based on:
- Requirements outlined;
- Details agreed upon with your AOR or COR; and
- Opportunities or requests to share documentation about your work beyond USAID.

Ask your AOR or COR which reporting template to use.

Here is a sample template, as a general report structure. This can be downloaded and adapted to your needs.

At the end of this module you will find examples of progress reports that have been posted to the DEC.

SLIDE 8: Key Elements of Progress Reports

Sections include a brief activity overview, progress to date, management issues, lessons learned, how previous issues were addressed, and upcoming activities. Your award agreement may require more, such as crosscutting issues, changes to your agreement, or your monitoring, evaluation, and learning—MEL—plan.

Your report should include a section with updates on performance indicators. Also, with guidance from your AOR or COR, include your activity's budget and spending to date.

As we said before, report requirements vary depending on your award. Talk to your AOR or COR if you have questions about requirements and what to include if sharing your report publicly.

Now, let's go over report sections in greater detail.

SLIDE 9: Activity Overview

Your overview section summarizes important information about your activity. It typically includes two elements:
- First, an introduction and basic description of the activity. Make this a brief paragraph (no more than a page) with activity goals, objectives, target population, and locations. This overview can be standardized. You do not need to change it for every report unless there is a major shift in the activity.
- Next is a summary of results to date. These may be presented as a table showing key indicators defined in the monitoring, evaluation, and learning, or MEL, plan. Update this in each report to include your most recent data.

Here's a tip: Progress reporting draws heavily on an activity's MEL system. Learn more about how to develop and use the system in the MEL training module.

SLIDE 10: Progress on Implementation

This section provides an overview of progress since your last report. Often, this section includes four parts.

- The first is a progress narrative. Usually one or two pages, it highlights what you achieved, whether the activity is on track, and what is changing as a result of your work.
- Implementation status is broken down by objective, result, or other defined categories. Compare what was planned and what was achieved.
- In implementation challenges, you explain issues and barriers, how they affected your work, and the steps you will take to adjust.
- The MEL plan update outlines challenges or successes related to data collection and quality. It includes your efforts to document lessons learned—plus, if needed, anticipated revisions to indicators or the MEL plan itself. Discuss your revisions with your AOR or COR.

USAID may also request information specific to country priorities or Agency initiatives.

Last, report on any significant collaboration with the local government, private-sector companies, and other NGOs or donors.

SLIDE 11: Management and Administrative Issues

Here, you will document any challenges that may affect activity performance. These may include staff changes, procurement issues, security concerns, and challenges in managing sub-partners. Highlight any efforts to address them.

Use this part of your report to identify needed support and resources and any actions that require USAID approval.

This section can also be used to document upcoming procurement actions that need USAID approval, such as personnel changes, major purchases, or selection of contractors.

Discuss issues with your AOR or COR before you submit the report. It should not contain surprises!

SLIDE 12: Lessons Learned

This section provides information on your successes, failures, and challenges.

Here, you discuss whether your assumptions about what would work and what would be challenging are proving true. Review the effectiveness of your implementation approaches and gather data to help fill information gaps.

Lessons learned can be shared with others that are developing, implementing, and evaluating similar programs.

SLIDE 13: Address Feedback from Prior Report

USAID staff or other stakeholders may have provided feedback on your previous report. In this section, describe what your organization changed in response to comments.

For example, USAID might ask you to adjust your use of logos so they comply with guidelines. Have you made any changes in response to this feedback?

Other feedback might be a suggestion to work with a local organization to implement an activity in your work plan. Address that feedback here.

SLIDE 14: Planned Activities for New Reporting Period

In this section, outline actions and events to provide USAID with a preview of what to expect in your next reporting period.

Highlight activities that may require or benefit from USAID involvement, such as community events or presentations that your AOR or COR can attend.

SLIDE 15: Additional Sections per Your Agreement or Contract

Here, you can talk about crosscutting issues or specific USAID initiatives in your agreement or contract. Are there specific contextual issues? Observations about Agency strategies to support sustainability? Updates on how your work addresses climate change, gender inequalities, or social inclusion?

You can also use this section to identify a need to modify your award requirements. For example, you may need to change your MEL plan. You should discuss any award modifications with your AOR or COR.

SLIDE 16: Annexes

An annex offers detail on a specific element of a report. The following are commonly included in progress reports:
- A performance management review is usually a table showing progress against the targets in your approved MEL plan. This annex can include both quantitative and qualitative data to support the results you reported in the "Activity Implementation Progress" section.

- A financial report summary details spending against the activity budget and also spending for the next reporting period.
- Success stories are useful in communications and media outreach. Provide at least one story each reporting period that illustrates success of your activity.

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SLIDE 17: Progress Report Process

So far, we looked at the information you need to include in reports. Now comes the process of creating quality reports and using them as part of a strong management system.

SLIDE 18: Establish Best Practices

To approach successful progress reporting, establish strong activity management practices across your team. Ensure roles are clear and timelines are kept. Set a schedule to regularly assess progress.

Anticipate making adjustments and identifying ways to share information with stakeholders. Document challenges and successes. Note areas that would benefit from additional data-gathering or research.

SLIDE 19: Reporting Timeline

As we mentioned, USAID awards generally require reports quarterly, semiannually, or annually.

The reporting timeline may coincide with the U.S. Government's fiscal year, which runs October 1 to September 30. Timelines might also be based on the award start date.

Check your award agreement and ask your AOR or COR when to submit progress reports.

Once your timeline is clear, plan for the following.
- First, gather data and other information you need to document implementation.
- Then, review your activity's progress with the team. Draft your report and conduct internal reviews as needed.
- Finally, submit your report to USAID and prepare for opportunities to share it with stakeholders.

The time needed to complete your report can range from a few days to a few weeks. For example, if you are working with a lead or prime organization, or partnering with sub-contractors, build in extra time to coordinate and consolidate information.

SLIDE 20: Gather Information

To prepare for a progress report, start by reviewing your activity's work plan.

Consider efforts and results you anticipated during the reporting period, the timeframe you set to accomplish them, and methods you proposed for key tasks.

Use data from your MEL system and your financial management system.
- Quantitative information is measured in numbers, such as the amount of households reached.
- Qualitative information includes insights on activity challenges and successes, such as staff feedback and stakeholder interviews.

Get spending information from your financial management system. You will not include budget details in your report, but this information can determine if your budget allocations are appropriate for results achieved and where you are in your activity's life cycle.

For more information, refer to USAID's MEL and Financial Reports training modules.

SLIDE 21: Assess Progress

After gathering information needed to assess progress, confirm your data is high-quality and complete.

Next, perform initial analyses to identify trends or patterns in data. Link qualitative and quantitative data so you have a complete picture of activity implementation.

Schedule a time to conduct a "pause and reflect" session with the activity team to discuss results. To "pause and reflect" means to dedicate time monthly, quarterly, or semiannually to discuss how work is progressing. It is an opportunity to recognize best practices and plan for improvements.

Ask your team:
- What is working well?
- What challenges are we facing?
- What are the reasons for any shortfalls against planned targets?

- How can these issues be addressed?
- What lessons have we learned in this reporting period?
- What success stories can we highlight?

SLIDE 22: Collaborate, Learn, and Adapt

Progress reporting is more than creating a document for USAID. The process reinforces collaborating, learning, and adapting, or CLA.

CLA encourages your team to work together and with other stakeholders to improve your activity.

As discussed in the previous slide, "pause and reflect" sessions are a great way to gather team insights. Consider what partnerships are essential to implementation. Identify what drives success or failure. Discuss how you can adjust the activity's strategy or model to amplify results.

By sharing issues and ideas, you can adopt successful approaches throughout the activity.

SLIDE 23: Draft, Review, and Submit

Now you can draft your progress report and circulate it for review. Assign drafting of the report to team members with strong English and writing skills.

Depending on organization size, drafting reports may be the responsibility of the activity manager, country director, or a communications specialist.

Reviewers may include the activity director or other senior staff. In larger organizations, a headquarters team member might review, finalize, and submit reports.

Share the reports with staff and key stakeholders. Consider creating a summary version for participants and communities, with highlights translated into local languages.

SLIDE 24: Preparing Annual Reports

Awards may require annual reports in addition to quarterly or semiannual reports. These should provide more detailed summaries of quarterly or semiannual reports.

Use information from quarterly or semiannual reports to analyze goals and impacts and any changes needed.

Usually, a quarterly or semiannual report is not required at the same time as an annual report. Check your award agreement and ask your AOR or COR to confirm the information you should include.

SLIDE 25: Capturing and Sharing Experiences

Sharing your activity successes and challenges helps ensure development efforts can adapt and improve. Capturing and sharing your best practices informs how USAID can work with its partners to achieve cost-effective and stronger results.

You can share your insights widely by submitting your report to the DEC. Review submission requirements with your AOR or COR. You can find more details in USAID's ADS chapter 540. ADS stands for Automated Directives System. These are the Agency's operational policies and procedures.

SLIDE 26: Tips for Strong Progress Reports

Here are two tips for making your progress report useful and interesting.

First, keep it concise. AORs and CORs have multiple reports to review. Include only details that communicate your activity's successes, challenges, and improvement plans. Do not overwhelm readers with long text.

Second, make it visual. Graphs and tables present complex information easily, and photographs effectively engage your audience and convey your points.

SLIDE 27: Summary

Let's review some key points of this training module:
- A robust reporting process provides accountability and transparency.
- Report requirements vary from award to award. Your first steps are to check your award agreement and talk to your AOR or COR.
- Report preparation is an opportunity for your team to "pause and reflect" on what is working well and what can be improved.
- Good reporting supports a well-managed activity.

SLIDE 28-29: Resources

Here are several resources we shared during this training series. Remember, you can always ask your AOR or COR.

SLIDE 30: Thank You

Thank you for taking the time to learn about USAID's reporting requirements. We hope this training module has helped.

We invite you and your staff to review the other modules in our "How to Work with USAID" training series.

SLIDE 31: Acknowledgement

This module was produced by the United States Agency for International Development. The presentation team is composed of staff from USAID and the Partnerships Incubator.

USAID thanks everyone who contributed their time and ideas to this series.