PREPARING FOR YOUR USAID POST-AWARD ORIENTATION CONFERENCE TRAINING MODULE

SLIDE 1: Introduction

Welcome to the "Effectively Responding to USAID Funding Opportunities" module of the "How to Work with USAID" training series.

This module will be of particular value to organizations with limited or no experience working with USAID. But, *any* organization that needs to better develop complete and successful responses to Agency announcements of funding opportunities will find this information useful.

SLIDE 2: Learning Objectives

Congratulations! You worked hard to prepare and submit a proposal or an application for this opportunity to work with USAID. The Agency determined that your organization was best equipped to implement this important work. The post-award orientation conference will be your first formal, face-to-face meeting with USAID to discuss your program.

In this module, we will review best practices to help you prepare for your post-award conference.

After completing this module, you will understand what to expect regarding the participants and process of the meeting, as well as the purpose of the meeting.

Finally, in this module, you will discover how to use this opportunity to better manage your award and enhance your partnership with USAID.

Please note, at the end of the module, we will provide helpful links to the resources discussed in the module.

Before we begin, however, let us review why it is important for USAID to partner with organizations such as yours.

SLIDE 3: Why USAID Partners with Organizations

The Agency's mission is to lead the U.S. Government's international development and disaster assistance efforts. USAID offers this assistance on behalf of the American people through partnerships and investments that:

- save lives

- reduce poverty

- strengthen democratic governance, and

- help people emerge from humanitarian crises and progress beyond assistance.

Through funding, USAID partners with thousands of organizations around the world that share the Agency's development goals and can contribute to those goals.

DIVIDER SLIDE: Rules and Regulations

It is important to consider U.S. Government and USAID regulations when preparing to implement an Agency award, so you should review these regulations before your post-award orientation conference.

Two sets of regulations govern USAID awards of all types, including acquisition awards, also called contracts, and assistance awards, also known as grants and cooperative agreements.

The first set of U.S. Government regulations you need to know about is the Code of Federal Regulations, or CFR. These regulations govern how USAID issues acquisition and assistance awards. Within the CFR is a subset of government regulations called the Federal Acquisition Regulations, or FAR. The FAR comprises the primary rules that guide how U.S. Government agencies, including USAID, acquire supplies and services. We will discuss relevant sections of the FAR as we review key elements of contracts.

Next, there are the USAID internal policies found in the Agency's own Automated Directives System, or ADS. This document outlines all operational policies, covering all Agency and partner activities. Assistance awards are covered by ADS Chapter 303, which is titled "Grants and Cooperative Agreements." Acquisition awards are covered by ADS Chapter 302, which is titled "Direct Contracting." Many of these requirements will be written into specific funding solicitations.

Finally, there are USAID's Acquisition Regulations, or the AIDAR. These regulations govern how the Agency administers public funds. It is the AIDAR that allows USAID to make reasonable assessments of contractor capabilities and determine who is responsible for costs.

SLIDE 5: Your USAID Contacts

Before we talk in more detail about the purpose of the post-award conference, let us review the roles of the USAID representatives you can expect to work with throughout your award.

The person who has the authority to enter into, administer, close out, and terminate an award agreement is called the Agreement Officer, or AO, for assistance awards, which include grants and cooperative agreements; for acquisition awards, or contracts, it is the Contracting Officer, or CO.

The AO or CO is able to make changes to any term or condition in an award, such as the statement of work, period of performance, and requirements. They may approve budget increases or realignments as well as additional purchases. Finally, they may authorize changes to the award's scope that would require adjustments to the partner's effort, time, or money.

The AO or CO has representatives who serve as their agents in the management or oversight of an award. The representative will be your main USAID point of contact for technical matters on your award.

For assistance awards, the Agreement Officer's Representative, or AOR, monitors the recipient's progress and verifies that the project activities conform to the terms and conditions of the award agreement. The Contracting Officer's Representative, or COR, is responsible for technical oversight and administration of an acquisition award.

USAID will issue an AOR or COR Designation Letter, which authorizes the AOR or COR to perform specific functions on behalf of the AO or CO. Read this letter carefully and be sure you understand the role and functions of your AOR or COR.

DIVIDER SLIDE: Prepare for Your Conference

You can expect to receive a lot of information during your post-award orientation conference. Let us discuss how to prepare for the meeting.

SLIDE 7: The Most Critical Step: Read Your Award

One of the key points to take away from this module is the importance of reading your award in full prior to the post-award conference. The award agreement will include several important details you may discuss in full during your post-award conference to be sure you understand your organization's obligations.

In advance of the meeting, provide the award documents to all individuals from your organization, particularly your chief of party and other key personnel, who should attend.

SLIDE 8: Review Award Requirements

As you examine your award, take notes on requirements.

In general, most USAID award agreements begin with an outline of the roles of Agency staff and your organization's staff. You will also find sections devoted to the statement of work, supplies and services, inspections, and deliverables or performance. Your award agreement also may include details on any special contract requirements and attachments related to the administration of your project.

SLIDE 9: Ask questions

Prepare any questions and send them to your AOR or COR in advance of the post-award conference. Be open about anything that is unclear to you in your award document.

These are some critical questions to consider:

- Who from USAID receives my deliverables, and when are they due?
- How will my organization be paid or reimbursed by USAID?
- When and how should my organization ask for an additional obligation?
- What are the tax (VAT) requirements for my award?
- When and how do I need to seek approvals from my Contract Officer, Agreement Officer, or their representative?
- What audits are required by USAID? How often will they be conducted and what will they cover?
- Are there formats for deliverables and invoice submissions—or any templates I should use?

Note also the following actions you should take immediately.

First, make a list of required deliverables with deadlines. Pay special attention to the first set of deliverables with short-term deadlines. Often, the award will specify the number of calendar days until the due date—and the clock starts from the signature date on the award agreement.

Second, once you have noted all of the deliverables and deadlines, map out a timeline for the project.

Remember, the post-award orientation meeting is an opportunity for your organization to clarify key dates and processes.

DIVIDER SLIDE: What to Expect

USAID will provide information on when, where, and how the post-award conference will be organized. Let us go over what you can expect at the meeting itself.

SLIDE 11: Meet Relevant Personnel

The post-award conference is an opportunity for you to meet face to face with the USAID staff who will oversee your award. Those representing the Agency will vary, depending on the Mission or Operating Unit, the type of award you received, the technical office funding the work, and administrative personnel.

Generally, you can expect the following USAID personnel to attend:

- Your Contracting Officer, Agreement Officer, and their representative, depending on the type of award;
- A Financial Management Office representative;
- An environmental compliance representative; and
- Program or technical staff.

You may also meet a development outreach and communication, or DOC, representative. Among other things, the DOC staff can help answer questions you may have regarding your compliance with branding and marking requirements. Moving forward, your AOR or COR will work with you to determine whether the DOC office will support any public outreach for your activity.

To represent your organization, USAID expects you to bring all key personnel working on your award, including:

- Your project chief of party, also known as the director or team leader, and their relevant deputies;
- Your finance and operations manager; and
- Any of your staff members who will provide primary administrative oversight for the project, such as the home office project manager and technical specialist—although these individuals might go by different titles in your organization.

All of your key personnel should attend the conference, and you are encouraged to bring additional project staff who would benefit from the opportunity to hear from and interact directly with USAID.

In addition, you should ensure any sub-partners you may have on the award are kept informed—either by inviting them to this post-award orientation meeting or by providing them a post-award conference debrief.

SLIDE 12: What Will Be Covered

Your AO or CO will likely lead the meeting and go through key administrative portions of the award. They will also introduce your AOR or COR as your key point of contact at USAID.

The Agreement Officer, Contract Officer, or their representative will then outline expectations for various documents, including your work and management plans; your monitoring, evaluation, and learning (or MEL) plan; and quarterly, annual, and final reports.

Depending on the award, other topics may include payments and funding, environmental compliance, and branding and marking requirements. In terms of financial management, important areas covered may include financial reports and invoicing, spending obligations, and the process for requesting advances and reimbursements.

The meeting is also an opportunity for you to share your organization's "To Do" list, such as plans for hiring, office infrastructure, and follow-up meetings.

We provide links to training modules on many of these topics on the "Resources" page at the end of this module.

SLIDE 13: Build Your Relationship with USAID Contacts

The primary focus of the USAID post-award orientation conference is to review your award and discuss USAID compliance requirements and performance expectations. However, the meeting is also an opportunity for you and your USAID points of contact to begin building an important working relationship.

You will be working closely with your COR or AOR for the duration of the award. A positive working relationship between you and your Agency representative ensures smooth collaboration throughout implementation.

SLIDE 14: Understand Communication Preferences

Use the post-award meeting to ask your AOR or COR about their preferences for working together, including how involved they expect to be in technical planning and implementation. Also ask how they prefer you to communicate—by phone, email, or in person—and how often.

You are required to keep your COR or AOR informed of your activity progress. Your award will outline formal reporting requirements, such as quarterly progress reports, annual reports, and monthly and quarterly financial reporting. However, there will also be informal communication throughout the

project. Understanding the preferences of your AOR or COR will encourage successful coordination and facilitate helpful feedback throughout the lifetime of your project.

Ask these four questions of your COR or AOR:

- First, what types of meetings are needed?
- Second, how frequently should you meet?
- Third, what are their preferred communication tools?
- Finally, who else should be included in your meetings with USAID?

SLIDE 15: Gain Detailed Guidance

Good implementation of a USAID award starts with a comprehensive understanding of the operating environment and USAID's goals. The post-award orientation conference is an opportunity to gain detailed guidance to ensure your proposed interventions align with the Agency's strategies for the region.

Before the meeting, begin by reading the Mission's Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS), a link to which is available on the "Resources" page at the end of this module. The CDCS is a strategic roadmap each Mission prepares to outline its five-year plan for designing and delivering activities in the country.

Also study current political and economic events in the country. Consider how your activity may be affected or influenced by the current operating environment.

Finally, prepare questions to ask USAID staff about their understanding of the environment.

For example, if you are implementing an education project, consider asking questions at your post-award conference such as:

- What is USAID's relationship with the Ministry of Education?
- What other education projects is the Agency implementing in the country?
- What does USAID consider the greatest challenge in efforts to improve education outcomes?
- What important issues are going to help or hinder achievement of your expected results?

SLIDE 16: Confirm Details and Process

Here is a summary of some helpful tips for the meeting.

First, take the time to clarify deliverables and deadlines. Pay special attention to deliverables due in the first few months. Check your award to confirm the date it was signed by USAID. The day count starts on the award signature date.

Then, ask your AOR or COR if there are templates they recommend you use for each deliverable. There may be required templates for certain deliverables, or your AOR or COR may prefer a particular format, length, or style. Asking early on can help save time later when you are preparing deliverables for submission.

Finally, discuss their preferences for reviewing drafts, so they can provide feedback before final submission dates. For example, your AOR or COR may wish to receive a draft of a deliverable so they can provide guidance and direction before you submit.

DIVIDER SLIDE: After the Conference: Next Steps

In this final section, we will consider what happens after your post-award orientation conference.

SLIDE 18: Notes and Follow-up

Your team may gain valuable information and useful insights during the conference, and you will want to make sure everyone remembers them after what could be a long meeting. Therefore, we suggest designating at least one team member from your organization to take notes during the meeting.

Afterward, share the consolidated notes with all participants, including those from USAID, to ensure everyone has the same understanding and has an opportunity to provide any corrections or updates.

Your AOR or COR may request—or you may ask—to share the plan for your award with the rest of the Mission, Bureau, or Operating Unit. Always copy your AOR or COR on *any* communication with USAID.

We also recommend that you debrief with your full team—including any sub-partners—so the deliverables and due dates in your award are clear for all responsible.

SLIDE 19: Summary of Key Points

Implementing your USAID-funded project may require a continuous learning and adaptation process, because what has been planned on paper cannot account for all possible contingencies once a project has started. But it is essential that your organization and USAID establish a solid working foundation. That is what the post-award conference is all about.

We hope you will walk away from this training module with a clear understanding of the following five key points:

First, read your award. Know what you are responsible for and what to expect from USAID.

Second, prepare yourself for the conference by reviewing who you will meet and what will be covered. Use the time to become acquainted with key USAID staff and learn their expectations.

Third, take the opportunity to ask any and all questions. Clarify details or terms you are not familiar with.

Fourth, establish a foundation for effective working relationships and preferences. Agree on how you will collaborate with your AOR or COR to achieve success.

Finally, understand roles and responsibilities. Know what is allowed, what is not, and how to properly follow USAID protocols and management processes.

Remember, the post-award orientation conference is your opportunity to get acquainted and come to important agreements with USAID. Relax, and show everyone you are ready to work together in a successful partnership with the Agency.

SLIDE 20: Resources

Here, we provide some resources to help you understand USAID's programming and requirements.

SLIDE 21: Thank You

Thank you for taking time, through this module, to learn how to prepare for your post-award orientation conference. We hope it will help you and your organization know what to expect and how to best prepare for this important meeting and the beginning of your working relationship with USAID.

SLIDE 22: 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 all the individuals who contributed their time and ideas toward the development of this training module.

Please email any questions or feedback you may have to IndustryLiaison-at-USAID-dot-gov.

To learn more about partnering with USAID, please visit www-dot-Work-with-USAID-dot-org. Again, that is www-dot-Work-with-USAID-dot-org.