

# Strengthening Country Digital Health Capacity



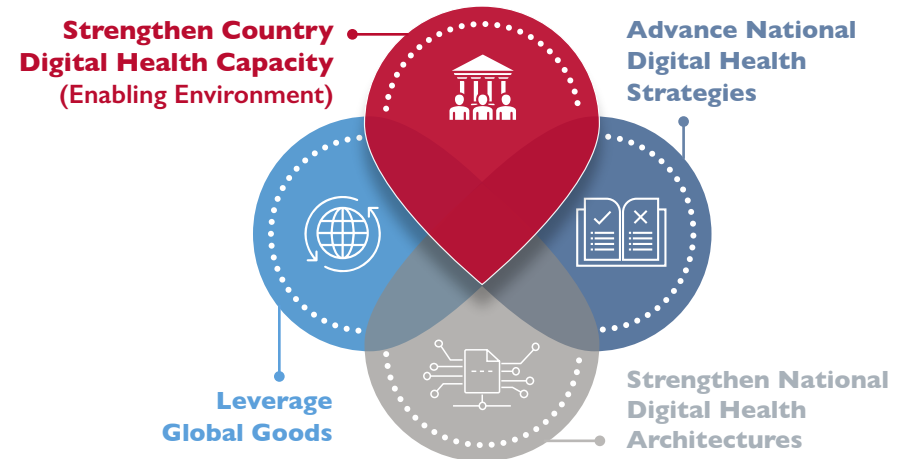
## ABOUT THIS NOTE

This Note includes:

- An **Overview** of country digital health capacity
- **Recommended actions** aligned to the USAID Program Cycle
- **Country examples** and illustrative personas demonstrating how USAID staff can align activities with recommendations
- A **Summary checklist** to support USAID staff and partners with implementing the *Digital Health Vision*

This is the first in a four-part Technical Guidance Note Series designed to support implementation of the core priorities of the USAID [Digital Health Vision](#) (Figure 1). The primary audience for this technical guidance note is USAID staff working on health teams at both headquarters and USAID Missions, including Agreement Officer's Representatives, Contracting Officer's Representatives, activity managers, and technical advisors.

**FIGURE 1.** Four strategic priorities of the *Digital Health Vision*



For a series overview and additional guidance notes, visit [USAID's Digital Health Vision web page](#).

# OVERVIEW

## Strengthening country digital health capacity

Assessing and strengthening country digital health capacity, also called the “enabling environment,” is essential for effective and sustainable use of digital technologies and data systems at scale.

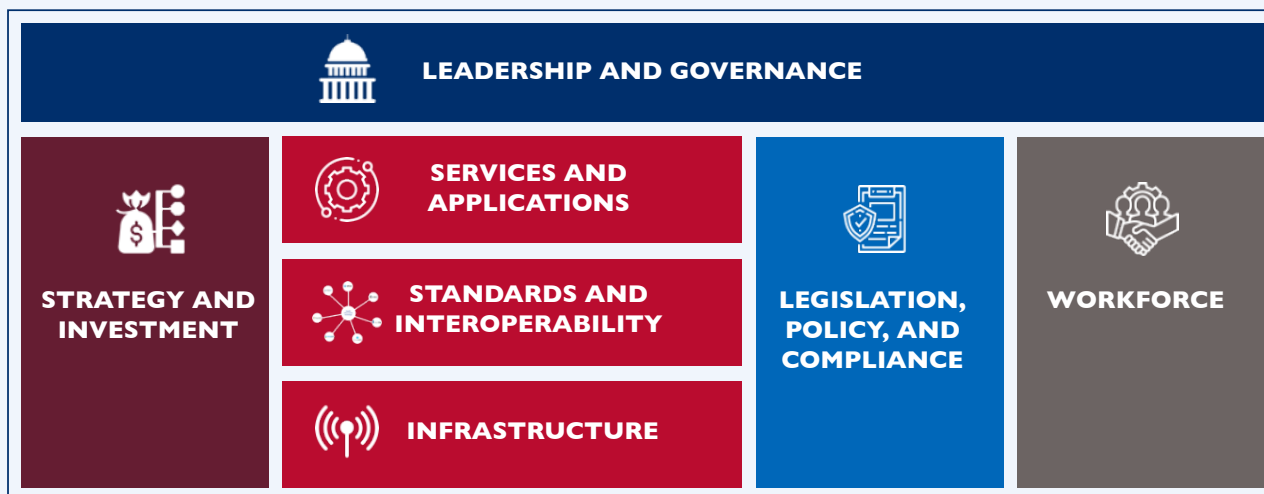
Digital technologies and data systems play an increasingly important role in health systems globally. As use of these tools grows, it is critical that global health funders provide sufficient support to strengthen country capacity to plan for, manage, and use these systems and the data they enable. By benchmarking and regularly assessing a country’s digital health enabling environment, funders including USAID can target their investments to help unlock the full potential of digital technologies to advance health priorities.

## What is country digital health capacity?

Country digital health capacity includes the human, institutional, and technological components required to enable the effective management and use of digital technologies and data systems that support a country’s health goals.

In the 2012 [National eHealth Strategy Toolkit](#), the World Health Organization (WHO) and International Telecommunication Union (ITU) outlined common “building blocks” (Figure 2) of country digital health enabling environments. These building blocks are leadership and governance; strategy and investment; services and applications; standards and interoperability; infrastructure; legislation, policy, and compliance; and workforce.<sup>1</sup> When adequately supported, these components together help ensure the effective and appropriate use of digital tools to strengthen health systems and health service delivery. More recent literature has elaborated on the role of data governance and data use.<sup>2</sup>

**FIGURE 2.** The seven eHealth building blocks from the WHO/ITU National eHealth Strategy Toolkit



<sup>1</sup> The *Digital Health Vision* refers to the digital health enabling environment as the WHO-ITU “building blocks” as well as data use. It is complementary to the term “digital ecosystem” used in the USAID Digital Strategy to refer to “the 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” (USAID Digital Strategy: 2020–2024, p. 3). The *Digital Health Vision* uses the term “enabling environment” to be consistent with terminology for the use of digital technology in the health sector. For more information about the WHO-ITU building blocks, see the ITU [National eHealth Strategy Toolkit](#) (2012).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the 2016 [Data Use Partnership Theory of Change](#) and the 2022 [Health Data Governance Principles](#).

## Why invest in country digital health capacity?

Country capacity is integral to all health programs, and especially those that are digitally enabled.

Introducing digital technologies does more than change the format of health data, information, and services. Digitization can also significantly increase the volume and velocity of data, requiring new skills, workflows, and business processes around the planning for and management of digital systems and data exchange. This capacity is particularly critical considering the complexity of digital transformation at national scale, and the importance of investing in digital systems that are best able to contribute positively to health programs, such as by being rights-respecting,<sup>3</sup> secure, and interoperable.

USAID should invest in country digital health capacity to:

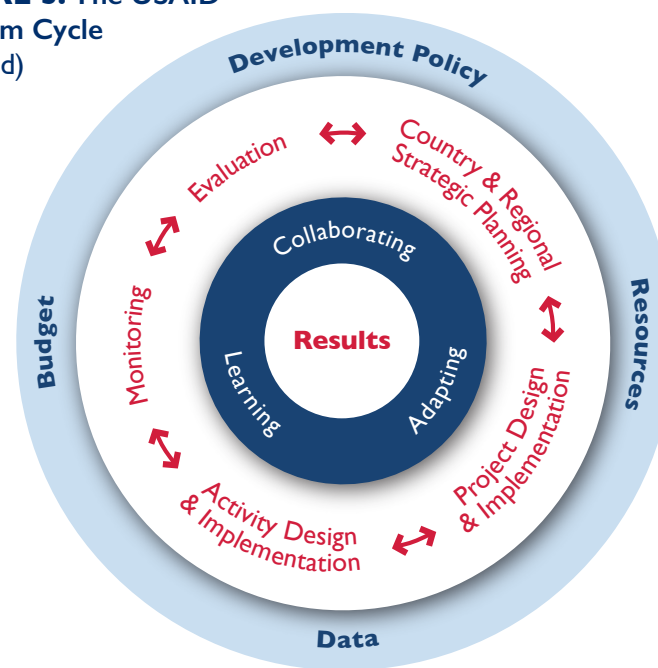
- Regularly benchmark and **track country digital health enabling environment readiness** to leverage strengths and prioritize gap areas in future planning and investments.<sup>4</sup>
- Understand the state of infrastructure, services, and applications, including the quality and reach of connectivity and **existing digital systems** to avoid fragmentation.
- **Enable sufficient workforce training and institutional strengthening**, as digital transformation often requires change management in business processes as well as technical skills.
- Ensure that investments **comply with country and/or regional digital and data policies** and, where needed, strengthen regulatory environments.
- **Promote peer learning**, including by capturing insights from country digital health enabling environment maturity journeys, and enabling knowledge exchange within and across countries.

<sup>3</sup> See USAID's [Considerations for Using Data Responsibly](#) (2019).

<sup>4</sup> See the Resources Library accompanying this Technical Guidance Note Series for tools to assess the digital health enabling environment (forthcoming).

## SUPPORTING COUNTRY DIGITAL HEALTH CAPACITY THROUGHOUT THE PROGRAM CYCLE

**FIGURE 3.** The USAID Program Cycle (adapted)



Country digital health capacity should be considered at every step of the [USAID Program Cycle](#) and within most—if not all—health procurements. The remainder of this technical guidance note provides suggested actions, key considerations, and resources to support USAID staff in integrating digital health capacity-building activities into their work throughout the Program Cycle.

# Country and Regional Strategic Planning

USAID's country and regional development cooperation strategies provide an important opportunity to articulate a strategic vision for how USAID funding will contribute to health-sector digital transformation within a particular geography. The following are recommended actions USAID staff should take in consultation and coordination with relevant country government representatives.

## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

► **To determine priority investment areas, gather information on a country's digital health enabling environment.** Using the eHealth building blocks (Figure 2), consider the following questions in planning country and regional development cooperation strategies:

- **Leadership and Governance:** Does the country have governance structures and/or stakeholder workgroups in place to prioritize, coordinate, and manage digital health investments? Are the governance structures working effectively and, if not, what gaps should be addressed?
- **Strategy and Investment:** Does the country have a current national strategy and costed implementation plan defining health sector digital technology and data priorities?<sup>5</sup>

Where country digital health strategies are weak or do not yet exist, USAID should prioritize the development of these strategies and their costed implementation road maps. These planning documents set the direction and identify key priorities for a country's digital health transformation and are a critical component of successful health sector digital transformation.

- **Services and Applications:** Does the country have an inventory of implemented digital health applications and systems and/or a national digital health architecture?<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See the [second technical guidance note in this series](#).

<sup>6</sup> See the third technical guidance note in this series (forthcoming).

<sup>7</sup> Understanding the current capabilities and limitations of a country's digital infrastructure is critical to informing USAID investments, as many digital technologies and data systems function best in environments with regular or at least periodic Internet connectivity.

<sup>8</sup> See USAID's [Digital Ecosystem Framework](#).

- **Standards and Interoperability:** Does the country have up-to-date guidance on data and information and communications technology standards, interoperability frameworks, and/or other technical guidance for data sharing?
- **Infrastructure:** Does the existing or planned physical infrastructure (e.g., Internet connectivity, electricity) support widespread accessibility to digital applications and data systems, and if not, what are the top priorities for further infrastructure build-out?<sup>7</sup>
- **Legislation, Policy, and Compliance:** Does the country have policies and legal and/or regulatory frameworks for digital health technologies and data systems?<sup>8</sup>
- **Workforce:** What are the priority training and resource needs to enable the health workforce at all levels within the health system to deliver on, and be fully supported by, national digital health and data systems investments and initiatives?

► **Identify other donors and partners working on digital health in country to coordinate and collaborate on investments.**

Government-led digital health governance structures play an important role in convening funders operating in country and aligning funding to country-led plans. In the absence of country-based governance bodies, USAID staff may opt to conduct outreach to known partners in country.

► **Consider innovative partnerships, including with the private sector, to leverage local knowledge, networks, and assets.**

Private-sector investment may provide opportunities for extending physical infrastructure or other components of the country's enabling environment that are complementary to USAID's work in support of country health and development goals.



# Design and Implementation of Projects and Activities

Beyond incorporating digital health strategic planning into multiyear country and/or regional development cooperation strategies, USAID staff should take a considered approach to the planning of more time-bound programmatic projects and activities involving digital technologies and data systems.<sup>9</sup> This approach should factor in the readiness of a country's digital health enabling environment as well as an awareness of USAID's broader digital health and data systems investment portfolio. In this way, USAID can promote complementarity and efficiencies across our investments while strengthening country capacity and enhancing patient-centered, integrated health service delivery.

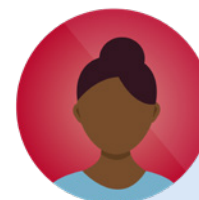
## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

- ▶ **Consider how specific project and activity goals can both leverage and further strengthen a country's digital health enabling environment.**

A list of guiding questions to support this analysis is provided below in Table I.

- ▶ **Link project and activity indicators to relevant country and regional development cooperation strategy goals and broader enabling environment strengthening deliverables.** Examples include using or developing standards, aligning with/participating in governance structures, and using and contributing to inventories tracking investments in country digital/data systems.

- ▶ **Incorporate reflections on how strengths and gaps in the enabling environment might be addressed in future long-term strategic planning and/or shorter-term projects and activities.** For building blocks that are under-resourced, take steps to consider how future funding by USAID and/or other funding partners could address gap areas.



**Precious Brenda**, a fictitious Health Specialist working in Country A, depicts how USAID staff can incorporate recommendations for strengthening country digital health capacity into their work. This persona is illustrative and has been created for use in this technical guidance note.

See page 9 for her story.

The following table provides sample guiding questions USAID staff can ask in assessing a country's digital health enabling environment, and provides examples of related USAID projects and activities.

<sup>9</sup> A project generally refers to a group of activities that are designed and managed in a coordinated way to advance result(s) set forth in a Country and/or Regional Development Strategy and foster lasting development gains in a country or region. An activity generally refers to an implementing mechanism that carries out an intervention or set of interventions or advances identified development result(s) in a country or region. See USAID's [Program Cycle Operational Policy](#) (p. 29).

**TABLE I. Guiding questions and country examples to support digital health enabling environments**

GUIDING QUESTION	COUNTRY EXAMPLE
 <p><b>BUILDING BLOCK: LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE</b></p> <p>How can USAID support, coordinate, and collaborate with government-led governance structures and stakeholder workgroups to advance digital health investments? Where there are gaps, how can USAID investments address those gaps?</p>	<p>USAID and partner Digital Square are collaborating with the governments of <b>Tanzania</b> and <b>Zanzibar</b> to support implementation of country digital health strategies and related initiatives. This work is strengthening government capacity to implement prioritized initiatives by operationalizing digital health governance structures, developing standard operating procedures, and supporting a culture of digital systems and data use. USAID's engagement is helping bring together partners to align resources and ensure responsiveness to government priorities.</p>
 <p><b>BUILDING BLOCK: STRATEGY AND INVESTMENT</b></p> <p>How can USAID align with and advance existing national strategies for digital health and related costed implementation plans? Are investments needed to strengthen or update these frameworks?</p>	<p>In the <b>Democratic Republic of the Congo</b>, USAID and partner Digital Square are investing to strengthen Ministry of Health governance of digital initiatives through the national digital health agency (ANICNS). Related activities include advocating for the alignment of other stakeholders' data and digital health investments to the country's national digital health strategy implementation road map, and supporting the development of a national digital health enterprise architecture, which will serve as the foundation for building an interoperable digital health system. These investments in turn will benefit a diversity of health programs in the country, including COVID-19 vaccination and other immunization activities under the national Expanded Program on Immunization.</p>
 <p><b>BUILDING BLOCK: SERVICES AND APPLICATIONS</b></p> <p>How do USAID investments leverage existing digital health solutions, align with national guidelines, and advance national digital health architecture? Where guidelines or frameworks are not yet available, how can USAID support their development?</p>	<p>Through the government of <b>Ethiopia's</b> Information Revolution framework, the government and development partners, including USAID and John Snow, Inc. (JSI), have created a national digital health architecture blueprint for the information, software, and hardware needs to advance health system goals. This "eHealth architecture" provides funders, including USAID, with an understanding of Ethiopia's priorities and a blueprint against which investments can align to advance data integration, interoperability, and data use for decision-making.</p>




**BUILDING BLOCK: STANDARDS AND INTEROPERABILITY**

How do USAID investments align with and advance country digital health standards, broader information technology standards, interoperability frameworks, and other technical guidance to enable data sharing?

Where there are gaps, how can USAID funds address these gaps?

In **Uganda**, the Ministry of Health and National Information Technology Authority-Uganda, with support from partners and academia, are working to strengthen the health system by developing a national data center and enterprise architecture with standards and interoperability requirements.<sup>10</sup>

To further these efforts, the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with Makerere University, completed a study that outlines requirements for data standards, communications infrastructure, and privacy and security. The study prioritized the development of a standards framework as a next step. With support from partners, the Ministry of Health developed health facility, client, and health care provider registries to ensure a standardized and uniform way to share data in the health system. USAID has provided technical support in the development of the Uganda Health Information and Digital Health Strategy, which is the main policy document guiding the country's digital health approach.


**BUILDING BLOCK: INFRASTRUCTURE<sup>11</sup>**

How do USAID investments assess the readiness/reliability of digital infrastructure in country, and how can USAID funds address related gaps and challenges?

As of late 2022, USAID's Power Africa<sup>12</sup> had provided clean and reliable electricity to more than 220 health facilities that together serve more than 2 million people on the continent. For example, in the mountains of **Lesotho**, Power Africa partner OnePower transformed a clinic by providing it with constant and reliable electricity. The clinic no longer runs on one loud diesel generator that disturbed sick patients and frequently failed. Instead, new solar panels enable nurses to use lights in the evening and provide uninterrupted access to lifesaving equipment in emergency situations.<sup>13</sup> Electrification paves the way for the establishment of health facility digital connectivity—a priority of the Health Electrification and Telecommunications Alliance, announced as part of President Biden's Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment infrastructure initiative.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See the [Uganda National eHealth Strategy 2017–2021](#) and MEASURE Evaluation's [Building a Strong and Interoperable Digital Health Information System for Uganda](#).

<sup>11</sup> The USAID [Digital Strategy 2020–2024](#) (p. 53) defines digital infrastructure as the “foundational components that enable digital technologies and services. Examples of digital infrastructure include fiber-optic cables, cell towers, satellites, data centers, software platforms, and end-user devices.”

<sup>12</sup> [USAID Power Africa](#).

<sup>13</sup> Power Africa blog post, “[Switching on ‘Silent Power’ for Clinics and Communities in Remote Lesotho](#),” June 9, 2021.

<sup>14</sup> [Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment](#)




**BUILDING BLOCK: LEGISLATION, POLICY, AND COMPLIANCE**

How do USAID investments align with and/or advance policies and laws on data sharing, privacy, and security and other laws that specifically apply to health data and information technology?

In 2022, **Rwanda's** Food and Drug Authority published regulations and guidelines to support the implementation of global standards for traceability of pharmaceutical products.<sup>15</sup> These measures are designed to decrease falsified medicines and improve patient safety. USAID, through the Global Health Supply Chain Program-Procurement and Supply Management (GHSC-PSM) project, supported Rwanda's Ministry of Health and Food and Drug Authority to create the Rwanda Pharmaceutical Traceability Strategy (2018–2024), establish a technical working group, and develop traceability regulations and guidelines. The strategy includes an objective focused on building and sustaining interoperable technology to increase data visibility. USAID through GHSC-PSM also worked to support Rwanda with implementing digital systems that align with country regulations and strategic priorities.


**BUILDING BLOCK: WORKFORCE<sup>16</sup>**

What are the training needs of the country's health workforce at all levels of the health system (e.g., national and local government leaders and information technology staff, facilities, community health workers, and other private-sector stakeholders) who will be supporting and/or using the digital health tool(s) planned under the activity or project? How can the project or activity strengthen capacity and address related human resource challenges?

In **Burkina Faso**, USAID partners MEASURE Evaluation and, subsequently, Country Health Information Systems and Data Use (CHISU) have worked to integrate information on zoonotic and human health threats at the community level. The One Health Information System (developed on the District Health Information System version 2 [DHIS2] software) was developed to encompass disease surveillance across human, animal, and environmental systems to support emergency response in the country.<sup>17</sup> As part of this work, as of May 2022, CHISU had trained 1,881 staff from three ministries (health, animal resources, and environment)—specifically, 79 national, regional, and provincial staff; 264 service point staff; and 1,538 community agents—to identify and report unusual health events that occurred in the community into the One Health Information System. This work demonstrates USAID's efforts to strengthen national and regional capacity.

<sup>15</sup> See the [Rwanda National Vision & Strategy for Pharmaceutical Traceability Leveraging GSI Global Standards](#).

<sup>16</sup> The World Health Organization's [Global Strategy on Digital Health 2020–2025](#) (p. 10) emphasizes that digital health workforce investments are needed at multiple levels, and that: “digital health can radically change health outcomes if it is supported by sufficient investment in governance, institutional and workforce capacity to enable the changes in digital systems and data use training, planning, and management that are required as health systems and services are increasingly digitized.”

<sup>17</sup> USAID Country Health Information Systems and Data Use (CHISU) blog post, [“Ministries Gain Better Insights From Interoperable Data in Burkina Faso,”](#) March 23, 2022.





## ILLUSTRATIVE PERSONA

### Precious Brenda

Health Specialist, Country A

Precious is a Foreign Service National Health Specialist working for USAID in Country A. In her role, Precious provides cross-portfolio support, developing strategies and ensuring alignment with USAID policies and government priorities. She provides input on several health topics and represents USAID on government working groups.

#### CONTEXT

In a recent workgroup meeting, Country A's Deputy Minister of Health stated that digital health would be a priority for the government in the coming years. Precious wants to gain additional knowledge about digital health to align USAID's work and support the Ministry of Health.

#### DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION IN ACTION

Upon returning from her meeting with the Deputy Minister of Health, Precious reviewed the *Country A National eHealth Strategy (2017–2022)*. From this document, she was able to see how digital health projects support the government's priorities and USAID's mission. Precious also reviewed the USAID COVID-19 [Map & Match](#) project Country A brief. This brief provides an overview of digital systems currently in use in the country. During her review, she notices that several of these systems could be useful to community health workers, and that better training for community health workers on digital tools and systems could lay the groundwork for scaling the country's digital health tools. Precious suggests incorporating a review of USAID-funded digital health activities in advance of the next Country and/or Regional Development Strategies cycle planning process. She also makes targeted recommendations for the alignment of existing activities, including adding a digital health module to the development of a community health worker training curriculum.

## ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATION FOR DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES:

As USAID designs investments to align funding to advance a country's digital health enabling environment, specific considerations to bear in mind include:

- ▶ **Prioritize privacy and security needs in all related investments** to secure digital systems, protect individuals' personally identifiable and sensitive information, and use data responsibly in alignment with best practices and relevant standards.
- ▶ **Invest in civil society and private sector partners to strengthen local capacity and leverage existing knowledge and networks.** Engaging local partners from civil society and the private sector can contribute to the overall strengthening and sustainability of national digital health systems and capacity.
- ▶ **Determine if existing USAID central or global procurement mechanisms are appropriate to support related investments.** USAID has a number of central procurement mechanisms in place for digital health projects and activities, and USAID participates in global digital health technical assistance facilities such as the WHO-ITU [Digital Health Centre of Excellence \(DICE\)](#), which can be supported via the UNICEF and WHO public international organizations agreements. Where bilateral mechanisms are pursued, ensure those activities align with USAID's *Digital Health Vision* investment approach.
- ▶ **Leverage evidence-based digital health lessons learned and promising practices,** such as those identified in the [Principles for Digital Development](#) and the [Digital Investment Principles](#).
- ▶ **Co-invest in content global goods,**<sup>18</sup> such as training curricula and information repositories that benefit all actors, such as by building digital health governance capacity<sup>19</sup> in a standardized manner or creating a common source for information about country digital systems (e.g., the [Digital Health Atlas](#)) and maturity (e.g., [Digital Health Index](#)).

For more Global Goods resources and other helpful references, please visit our **Resource Library** (forthcoming).

<sup>18</sup> See the [USAID Digital Health Vision for Action](#) pg. 10 for a definition of global goods.

<sup>19</sup> For an example of standardized digital health governance capacity-building, see the USAID-funded and co-developed [Digital Health: Planning National Health Systems course](#).

# Monitoring and Evaluation

To assess progress and fully inform future USAID investments, it is critical to understand the outputs, outcomes, and impact of health sector investments in digital technologies and the enabling environment.

## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

- ▶ **Create a well-articulated theory of change<sup>20</sup> or related framework that establishes a clear set of goals and indicators to measure impact.** It is important to develop a theory of change early in the project that articulates expectations about how investments in the digital health enabling environment will support programmatic outcomes.
- ▶ **Identify indicators to measure outcomes and impact to identify learnings, gaps, and opportunities to improve Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)** plans for country-based activities. Digital components should consider indicators that measure how these investments (a) align and contribute to maturing country digital health capacity, (b) contribute to advancing partner countries and USAID programmatic health goals, and (c) support USAID Congressional and other internal data reporting. The data and reporting needs may vary across projects and should be defined at activity/project initiation.
- ▶ **Develop a MEL plan and dissemination activities to share learnings. Define the MEL approach, including learning objectives, evaluation questions, data collection requirements, and alignment with existing or standard indicators.** This can also support the integration of MEL efforts with other related programs and existing national monitoring and evaluation processes.
- ▶ **Ensure appropriate data sharing agreements are in place to access data needed for meaningful monitoring and evaluation activities. Particularly in digital development, multiple data sources may exist to support MEL activities.** However, it is important to clearly identify the data owner and related stakeholders and ensure appropriate data sharing and data use agreements exist. Doing so will help ensure data sovereignty and provide greater access to data.

One example of how digital health capacity strengthening can be measured and tied back into a theory of change is by establishing a baseline maturity assessment, such as those published through the [Global Digital Health Index](#), and tying project outcomes to a repeat maturity assessment in a project at an activity's midpoint and at its conclusion. Where digital health is one component of a larger program, metrics tracking digital health contributions should be included in the broader theory of change.

<sup>20</sup> The [Data Use Partnership Theory of Change](#) is one example of how theories of change can be used to clarify the role of digital health in the improvement of health outcomes.

# Collaboration, Learning, and Adapting

Organizational learning and adaptive management are critical elements for strengthening country digital health capacity. From strategic planning to activity implementation and MEL, efforts should be made to capture lessons and best practices as well as contribute to the emerging evidence around digital health implementations. This is important not only for the country in which USAID is implementing a project or activity, but for continually improving and advancing USAID's approach to strengthening country digital health capacity.

## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

- ▶ **Prioritize evidence-based planning and identify gaps to promote continuous learning.** There is an ongoing need for practical, data-informed evidence on how to advance country digital health capacity as it is critical to the success of USAID programs overall. Such evidence—when available—can and should be used for strategic planning, project design and implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. When gaps exist in evidence (including within a specific country or technical area), USAID should assess the feasibility of contributing to the evidence base.<sup>21</sup>
- ▶ **Catalog projects and activities in the global [Digital Health Atlas](#) for transparency and to raise awareness with other relevant stakeholders.** The Digital Health Atlas is used by countries, donors, and implementing partners to quickly understand previous and current digital health activities in a country. USAID staff should ensure their digital health projects are included in this resource, such as by including in work plans that implementing partners provide related investment information to the Digital Health Atlas.
- ▶ **Support change management related to digital health to improve workflows, processes, operations, and more.** The digitalization of health system management or workflows may create confusion, uncertainty, or resistance if not paired with a change management plan. Such a plan should consider the role of national policies and standard operating procedures as well as cultural and resourcing factors that are necessary for buy-in at all levels of a health system.



**Lewis Hewitt**, a fictitious Mission Director working in Country B, depicts how USAID staff can incorporate recommendations for strengthening country digital health capacity into their work. This persona is illustrative and has been created for use in this technical guidance note.

See page 14 for his story.

<sup>21</sup> Examples of evidence-based resources can be found in the [Digital Square Resource Library](#).

- ▶ **Support peer-learning opportunities for knowledge sharing and collaboration.** Supporting country participation in peer-to-peer learning activities provides opportunities for additional learning and collaboration—and can reinforce multiple areas of country digital health capacity (e.g., leadership and governance, workforce).
- **Study visits** have been used to demonstrate successful digital health systems to interested countries. When possible, identify countries that are already conducting similar projects or activities to create opportunities for cross-country learning.
  - **Regional digital health networks**, such as the [Asia eHealth Information Network \(AeHIN\)](#) and [Red Centroamericana de Informática en Salud \(RECAINSA\)](#), help facilitate cross-country learning.
  - **Global networks** (e.g., the [Global Digital Health Network](#)) and **working groups** (e.g., the [Digital Health & Interoperability Working Group](#) and [Data Use Community](#)) provide platforms for sharing lessons and best practices.

- ▶ **Ensure evidence and best practices are captured and disseminated widely to incorporate learnings into other programs, projects, and activities.** While many projects and activities collect evidence over their lifetimes, many do not prioritize the formal capture or sharing of this evidence and related lessons. By ensuring that evidence generation and dissemination are prioritized, USAID can play an important role in continuing to advance the field of digital health and development.
- ▶ **Incorporate feedback loops into activity and program design to support adaptive management and enable continuous improvement.** Using accurate, timely data to adaptively manage a project or program allows information about the activity to inform continued improvements and adaptations. For example, building an SMS-based feedback system into a pharmaceutical supply chain activity in rural clinics enables more accurate supply forecasting.





## ILLUSTRATIVE PERSONA

### **Lewis Hewitt**

Mission Director, Country B

As the Country B Mission Director, Lewis manages the internal operations, development assistance portfolio, and policy issues affecting the Mission's programs. Prior to serving in this role, he worked on democracy and governance programs in Country C.

#### CONTEXT

USAID/Country B Tuberculosis (TB) Program has shown early stages of success implementing a text message reminder program for TB treatment adherence. Lewis wants to highlight this success and capture possible best practices that can be applied to other programs and sectors

#### COLLABORATION, LEARNING, AND ADAPTING IN ACTION

Lewis is asked to provide welcome remarks for a webinar being held by an implementing partner, HealthSmart. In preparation for the event, Lewis asks the health team for more details about how digital tools are being used in the country's TB program. The health team provides him with more information about digital referrals, adherence reminders, and digital TB diagnostics in three cities in Country B.

The webinar provides Lewis with additional information about HealthSmart's implementation approach and how they overcame infrastructure and human resource challenges. This includes an interactive training module for laboratory personnel. Lewis is impressed by how this work adapted to community needs and addressed contextual barriers facing implementation. He asks his team to develop a success story to share both the technology and the approach with other USAID Missions.



# RECOMMENDED ACTIONS CHECKLIST



This checklist captures key actions to consider when investing in and supporting country digital health capacity, aligned with the USAID Program Cycle.

## Country and Regional Strategic Planning

- Gather and review information related to the country's digital health enabling environment to determine priority investment areas.
- Identify other donors and partners working on digital health in the country to coordinate and collaborate on country investments.
- Consider innovative partnerships, including with the private sector, to leverage local knowledge, networks, and assets.

## Design and Implementation of Projects and Activities

- Assess the country's digital health enabling environment by reviewing relevant information to identify promising approaches and gaps.
- Ensure activities include enabling environment strengthening deliverables.
- Invest in digital health building blocks that require additional resources.
- Prioritize privacy and security needs in all related investments.
- Invest in civil society and private sector partners to strengthen local capacity and leverage existing knowledge and networks.
- Determine if existing USAID central or global procurement mechanisms are appropriate.
- Leverage evidence-based digital health lessons learned and promising practices.
- Co-invest in development of content global goods to contribute to reusable resources accessible to countries and partners.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

- Create a well-articulated theory of change that illustrates how digital health investments will lead to impact.
- Identify indicators to measure outcomes and impact.
- Develop a MEL plan and dissemination activities to share learnings.
- Ensure appropriate data sharing agreements are in place.

## Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting

- Prioritize evidence-based planning and identify evidence gaps.
- Catalog projects and activities in the Global Digital Health Atlas.
- Support peer-learning opportunities for knowledge sharing and collaboration opportunities.
- Support change management related to digital health.
- Ensure evidence and best practices are captured and disseminated widely.
- Incorporate feedback loops into activity and program design.

