



# Regional Development Cooperation Strategy (RDCS) Development and Approval Process

A Mandatory Reference for ADS Chapter 201

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## I. OVERVIEW

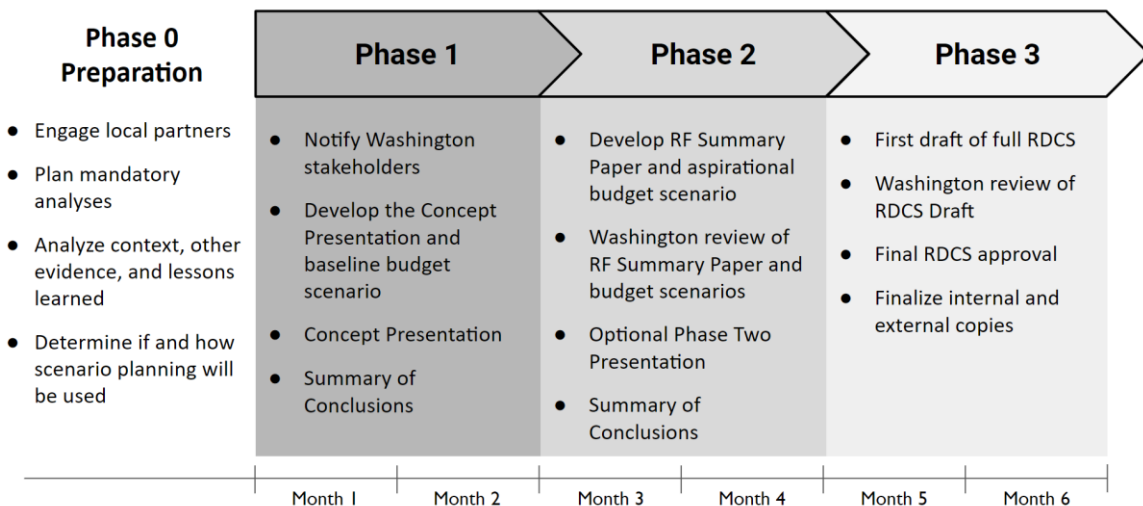
This mandatory reference describes the process for preparing, developing, and approving a Regional Development Cooperation Strategy (RDCS). This three-phase process is designed to facilitate an iterative dialogue between USAID Regional Missions and USAID/Washington (USAID/W) that results in clear decisions and Agency endorsement of a Regional Mission’s RDCS within a total timeframe of six to eight months. To achieve this timeline, this process includes a series of time-bound milestones for Regional Missions, as well as time-bound review periods for USAID/W. Advance planning, collaboration, and consensus building are critical to efficient strategy development, review, and approval.

Regional Missions, as defined in this Mandatory Reference, are field-based platforms that manage cross-border or multi-country programming and provide a range of regional functions based on the context and demands of bilateral Missions in their area of responsibility. Regional Missions may also manage bilateral programming in non- or limited-presence countries under their purview. Regional Missions should consult [ADS 201.3.2.4](#) and the relevant Regional Bureau to determine whether they should pursue an RDCS.

The RDCS process consists of three phases:

- Phase One – Initial Consultations and Parameter Setting (see **Section III**);
- Phase Two – Development of the Results Framework (see **Section IV**); and
- Phase Three – RDCS Preparation and Approval (see **Section V**).

Regional Missions should make initial preparations prior to launching Phase One (see **Section II** for additional guidance). The graphic below illustrates the major milestones and timeframes associated with each phase of the RDCS process:



## II. PHASE ZERO: PREPARATION FOR THE RDCS PROCESS

As described in **Section I**, the official RDCS process takes place across three phases, within a six to eight month timeline. Regional Missions can start preparing for the RDCS process after they conduct the mid-course stocktaking (MCST) for their current RDCS and should at a minimum start preparations one year before beginning Phase One. During the preparation phase, which is informally referred to as “Phase Zero,” Regional Missions, in consultation with their Regional Bureau Program Office and the Bureau for Planning, Learning, and Resource Management (PLR)’s Office of Strategic and Program Planning (SPP), should consult broadly with internal and external stakeholders. Consultations between the Regional Mission and relevant bilateral Missions in the region are particularly important to ensure that the proposed regional strategy both reinforces and is in coordination with relevant bilateral strategies. B/IOs who manage the three mandatory analyses (Climate, Tropical Forests and Biodiversity, and Gender) must also be included in these consultations. Additionally, Phase Zero preparations must include the following elements:

### A. Engaging Local Actors and Regional Partners

Development and humanitarian programming is more equitable, effective, and sustainable when it is locally led, locally owned, and inclusive. To this end, Regional Missions should ground their RDCS in locally identified priorities and needs, then identify strategic opportunities and align with USAID and U.S. Government (USG) policies and priorities based on those local priorities (as laid out in the [Policy Framework Rubric](#)). The first step for a Regional Mission is to collaborate with local and regional actors in preparation for, and throughout, the RDCS process to create a strategy that reflects a shared commitment to locally led change. This engagement should include close collaboration with the partner country governments in the region, regional bodies, the private sector, civil society, faith-based organizations, other donors, or others, to ascertain local and regional capacities, needs, priorities, and barriers to progress. During this process, Regional Missions should also assess the potential for a regional multi-governmental organization to serve as the counterpart for a Regional Development Objective Agreement (DOAG) during the life of the RDCS. A shared strategic vision embodied in the RDCS serves as the substantive basis and justification for a Regional DOAG.

Engaging local and regional actors without intentional efforts at inclusion has the potential to reinforce discrimination and unequal power structures within local contexts. Likewise, inclusion without the tools and practices of locally led development may not be as effective at centering decision-making with local actors or strengthening local systems. As part of this engagement process, Regional Missions should also make efforts to look beyond their traditional group of local partners to new collaborators, especially those from marginalized or underserved populations or with deep roots in the communities they support, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) individuals, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, or youth. Operating Units (OUs) may conduct a complementary Inclusive Development

Analysis (or incorporate elements of an Inclusive Development Analysis into the mandatory Gender Analysis), taking into account drivers of marginalization, and how to integrate findings in programming. For additional guidance, see the [Inclusive Development for ADS 201](#) and its [associated toolkit](#).

## B. Initiating the Three Mandatory Analyses

Completing RDCS development within six to eight months requires advance planning and coordination with the Bureaus/Independent Offices (B/IOs) who manage the mandatory analyses (the Bureau for Resilience, Environment, and Food Security (REFS)'s Center for Climate Positive Development for the Climate Analysis; REFS Center for Natural Environment, Biodiversity Division for the Tropical Forest and Biodiversity Analysis; and the Bureau for Inclusive Growth, Partnerships, and Innovation's Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Hub (IPI/GenDev) for the Gender Analysis). Those B/IOs are responsible for tracking and coordinating with Regional Bureaus and Regional Mission/OU counterparts to ensure requirements are met.

- **Gender Analysis:** Per legal requirements in the [Women's Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment Act of 2018 \(P.L. 115-428\)](#), gender analysis must shape USAID strategies. During Phase One of the strategy process, Regional Missions must complete a strategy-level gender analysis to inform the Phase One Concept Presentation, as well as to provide insights about key gender gaps and identify entry points and opportunities for improving gender equality in their RDCS. In Phases Two and Three, relevant regional development objective (RDO) narratives should include a summary of gender gaps and opportunities related to sectors included within the RDO. For additional guidance on the strategy-level gender analysis, and other gender analyses in the Program Cycle, see [ADS 205, Integrating Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in USAID's Program Cycle](#). OUs should confer with Regional Mission Gender Advisors/Points of Contact (POCs), Regional Gender Advisors, and GenDev to determine how to meet this requirement in a timely manner. Regional Missions must later build upon this analysis during subsequent project and activity design processes when conducting the required project- and activity-level analyses (see [ADS 201sam](#) and [ADS 201.3.4.4](#) on the project- and activity-level gender analyses, respectively). For guidelines on a complementary Inclusive Development Analysis, taking into account drivers of marginalization, and how to integrate findings in programming, consult the [Guide to Inclusive Development Analysis](#).
- **Tropical Forests and Biodiversity Analysis:** Per Sections 118 and 119 of the [Foreign Assistance Act \(FAA\)](#), as amended, Missions must assess: (1) the actions necessary in their country to conserve tropical forests and

biodiversity in their country/region, and (2) the extent to which the actions proposed in the RDCS meet the needs that were identified. For additional guidance on the tropical forests and biodiversity analysis, see [ADS 201mav, Foreign Assistance Act Sections 118 and 119 Tropical Forests and Biodiversity Analysis](#) and the [Analysis Best Practices Guide](#). OUs should confer with the REFS Center for Natural Environment, Biodiversity Division to determine how to meet this requirement.

- **Climate:** Climate variability and change is a cross-cutting issue that can undermine development progress. Executive Orders [13677](#) and [14008](#) require U.S. agencies to manage risk from climate variability and change, and directs the US Government to put climate at the center of its Foreign Policy agenda. For all new strategies, Missions and Overseas OUs must complete a climate analysis. The results of the climate analysis must be used to inform the development of the strategy and documented in the strategy's Climate Annex. For additional guidance, see [ADS 201mat, Climate Variability and Climate Change in USAID's Regional and Country Development Cooperation Strategies \(R/CDCSs\) and Strategic Frameworks](#). The Regional Mission or Overseas OU Program Office should confer with the Regional Bureau and the REFS Center for Climate Positive Development to determine how to meet this requirement.

### **C. Analyzing Additional Evidence and Lessons Learned**

Analyses play a significant role in ensuring that RDCSs are evidence-based and that Missions make informed strategic choices. Missions should consider when information is needed throughout the Program Cycle; not all analyses should be conducted during Phase Zero. In Phase Zero and even as early as the MCST, Missions should set an analytic agenda and timetable for completing the mandatory analyses and other critical assessments to inform decision-making, including about new approaches and shifts, as part of the RDCS process. Missions often identify analytic needs during the MCST and it is highly advisable to set and implement the analytic agenda as soon as feasible after the MCST. Previous analyses (for example, those conducted for activity design or implementation) should also be leveraged to inform the RDCS.

Because of the compact timeline associated with RDCS development and approval, to the extent feasible, Regional Missions should leverage existing analyses and evaluations that are relevant to the strategic decision-making process. Any substantial new research should be fit-for-purpose to meet information needs relating to contextual factors and potential shifts for the new RDCS. The analyses should inform Phase One and require advance planning to be completed on time. In most cases, a RDCS analytic agenda is comprised of but not limited to three categories:

*USAID-generated Data: MCSTs, Portfolio Reviews, Evaluations, PLR Office of Policy Implementation and Analytics support, and other Analyses*

- Lessons learned from the implementation of the current RDCS, including findings from the MCST, past portfolio reviews, and the monitoring, evaluation, or assessment of existing projects and activities.
- Data analysis and geographic information analyses supported by USAID/W, such as the PLR/PIA Analytics Team and the GeoCenter. Such analyses could be helpful in assessing important contextual trends, the geographic distribution of development priorities, and RDCS focus areas where resources may achieve the greatest results.
- Other USAID-generated sources of data, including USAID's [AidScape](#) suite of resources, particularly the [International Data and Economic Analysis \(IDEA\) data repository](#) and [Country Roadmap portal](#); PLR's [Country Data and Analytics homepage](#) (USAID internal) on ProgramNet; the [People's Republic of China Economic and Political Influence on Development \(PEPID\) Site](#); relevant [Digital Ecosystem Country Assessments \(DECA\)](#); and partner landscape analyses.
- Mandatory Analyses: See **Section II.B** on conducting Mandatory Analyses.

USG Interagency (State, Department of Defense, Millennium Challenge Corporation, Development Finance Corporation, etc.)

- Interagency strategic plans, some of which include the Embassy Integrated Country Strategies (ICS), Department of Defense Campaign Plans, Millennium Challenge Corporation Country Scorecards, and the Development Finance Corporation's Global Development Strategy.
- Reports from the Department of State on [Fiscal Transparency, Human Rights](#), and [Women, Peace, and Security](#).
- There are some interagency reports that may trigger additional requirements depending on the countries in the Regional Mission's portfolio:
  - Regional Missions that are operating in countries listed on the Tier 2 Watchlist or Tier 3 in the [Trafficking in Persons \(TIP\) Report](#) must address trafficking in persons in their RDCS.
  - Regional Missions with countries listed in [Atrocity Prevention](#), [International Religious Freedom](#), and the [Annual Report](#) of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), should consult these reports to determine their relevance for the new RDCS. Regional Missions that are operating in countries listed on Tier 1 (Countries of Particular Concern) and Tier 2 of USCIRF's Annual Report and/or the [Department of State's Report on International Religious Freedom](#) must address religious freedom in their RDCS.
  - Regional Missions with countries included in the top 30 of the United



States Holocaust Memorial Museum Early Warning Project annual ranking list of [Countries at Risk for Mass Killings](#) should review Atrocity Prevention considerations where appropriate and as applicable to the Regional Mission.

### Third Party Analysis and Evaluations

- OUs are highly encouraged to draw upon third-party analysis that are relevant to strategic decision-making and priority setting. Analyses and evaluations (including cost-effectiveness analyses and impact evaluations that incorporate counterfactual analysis), including those commissioned by other donors or organizations, local organizations, or interagency partners can provide valuable contextual information to inform parameter setting. The World Bank's [DataBank repository](#) is a helpful resource for the latest available third-party development data and analytical reports. OUs can also reference other donors' and partners' strategic frameworks or analyses, such as the [United Nations' Common Country Analyses](#).

#### **D. Reviewing USAID and USG Policies and Strategies for Alignment**

USAID regional strategies must be informed by USAID and USG priorities. The strategic planning process is grounded in finding the intersections among (1) the needs and priorities of local stakeholders, (2) the strategic opportunities to make significant development progress in a sector or region, and (3) alignment of those opportunities with USAID and USG policies, priorities, and resources. It is highly recommended that the Regional Mission, Regional Bureau, PLR/SPP, relevant PLR/BRM regional analyst, and other key Washington leadership confer during Phase Zero on specific regional or Agency priorities that are expected to be highlighted or embedded into the RDCS. Regional Missions should also apply Phase Zero findings and recommendations about policy alignment to inform drafting of the Phase One Concept Presentation. Regional Missions should review:

- The President's [National Security Strategy \(NSS\)](#), the [State-USAID Joint Strategic Plan \(JSP\)](#), and [State-USAID Joint Regional Strategies \(JRS\)](#), and relevant [ICS](#) (see [ADS 201.3.2.6](#) on Agency and inter-Agency strategies);
- The [USAID Policy Framework](#), and relevant sector policies and strategies from [USAID's Policy Registry](#), to prioritize among them based on alignment with local needs and priorities, opportunities for impact, and U.S. foreign policy and foreign assistance priorities;
- USAID's [Risk Appetite Statement](#) and [Acquisition and Assistance Strategy](#) to plan how to use co-creation and innovative procurement vehicles to engage with local systems and new and underutilized partners to advance sustainability;
- [USAID Agency Equity Plan \(AEP\)](#) to help Missions integrate equity into



Agency policies, strategies, and practices; enhance the ability of potential non-traditional partners to pursue USAID opportunities; prevent discrimination in Agency programs; and strengthen the Agency's capacity to advance inclusive development in our overseas programming; and

- Relevant sections of the [National Defense Strategy \(NDS\)](#), National Military Strategy, the Theater Campaign Plan of the relevant Department of Defense Geographic Combatant Command (GCC), if available, Department of Defense Country Plans, and programs or activities under Overseas Humanitarian, Disaster, and Civic Aid (OHDACA) Appropriations, available via the USAID development advisors stationed at each GCC.

### **III. PHASE ONE: INITIAL CONSULTATIONS AND PARAMETER SETTING**

#### **A. Overview of Phase One**

Phase One marks the official start of the RDCS process. The objective of Phase One is to enable a formal dialogue between the Regional Mission and relevant bilateral Missions, USAID/W B/IOs, and interagency stakeholders, that results in Agency endorsement of clear parameters and priorities for RDCS development. Regional Missions and Regional Bureau Program Offices should initiate Phase One six to eight months before they expect the RDCS to be approved. The following steps outline the launch of a RDCS:

1. The Regional Mission, in consultation with the relevant Regional Bureau Program Office, sets the start date of Phase One and the estimated target RDCS approval date, and documents this in an email from the Regional Mission to the Regional Bureau Program Office at least ten business days before the start of Phase One. Phase One can start before the mandatory analyses have been completed.
2. After consulting with their Regional Bureau Program Office and PLR, Regional Missions determine which Washington B/IOs are designated as primary reviewers in the RDCS process, based on parameter setting, budget, and Agency priorities or equities for that OU. B/IOs who manage the three mandatory analyses (Climate, Tropical Forests and Biodiversity, and Gender) must be designated as primary reviewers. Primary reviewers can raise significant issues (as well as general comments or concerns) in the RDCS review process, whereas other B/IOs can only submit general comments or concerns. In extenuating circumstances, if the focus or scope of the strategy shifts, the Mission, in coordination with the Regional Bureau, can add additional primary reviewers throughout the strategy development process, as needed.
3. The Regional Bureau Program Office communicates the start date of the RDCS process and the designated primary reviewers via an official launch email to the CDCS Review POCs ([cdcsreview@usaid.gov](mailto:cdcsreview@usaid.gov)). PLR is responsible for maintaining the email list of CDCS Review POCs.

During Phase One, Regional Missions are also encouraged to utilize the [USAID Policy Framework’s Rubric for Policy Implementation](#) to inform the Phase One Concept Presentation, which requires a presentation of policy alignment. Regional Missions should use the Rubric to structure discussions on how local and regional priorities, capacities, opportunities for impact, and constraints align with USAID and USG policy priorities. Further, in the Phase One Concept Presentation, the Regional Mission must describe which of the five challenges in the USAID Policy Framework they will prioritize, and note other Agency policy priorities that relate to the Regional Mission’s portfolio. Missions are not required to discuss all five challenges. The Regional Mission should describe priorities and tradeoffs, including policy areas that it has prioritized (or deprioritized), based on its analysis of local priorities, opportunities for impact, and organizational and resource constraints. This analysis should inform the preliminary strategic vision and choices (priority focus areas) for the new regional strategy.

Phase One should take approximately two months, and it has four major milestones:

1. Development of a Concept Presentation, which includes a baseline budget scenario (see **Section III.B** on the Concept Presentation and **Section III.C** on the baseline budget scenario);
2. USAID/W review of the Concept Presentation (see **Section III.D**);
3. Delivery of the Concept Presentation (see **Section III.E**); and
4. A Summary of Conclusions (SOC) (see **Section III.F**).

During Phase One, Regional Missions should continue to engage with relevant bilateral Missions and diverse and inclusive groups of local stakeholders to discuss strategic choices and priorities with a view to ensuring that the RDCS strengthens local and regional capacities and is aligned with local and regional priorities.

Phase One culminates in agreement between USAID/W and the Regional Mission on parameters and priorities for the RDCS, and the Regional Mission’s plan for developing the RDCS, including expectations for Washington support. The relevant Regional Bureau documents the agreements in the Phase One SOC (see **Section F**). While there is an opportunity for fine-tuning during Phase Two, in most cases, absent significant changes in regional context, policy, or funding levels, discussion of new sectors or priorities should not occur in Phase Two.

## **B. Development of the Phase One Presentation**

Based on the Regional Mission’s review of contextual data and analyses (including mandatory analyses), evidence and learning from implementation, and input from the partner government(s) and local stakeholders about priorities, Regional Missions must prepare a Phase One Concept Presentation (see the [Phase One slide deck template](#)

for additional instructions). The Regional Mission must submit the Phase One slide deck to the relevant Regional Bureau Program Office to distribute for USAID/Washington review at least ten business days in advance of the Phase One Concept Presentation.

The Phase One Concept Presentation slide deck should include:

- The most salient regional context factors that informed the Regional Mission's strategic choices, including a summary of the local stakeholders' and partner government's priorities, an assessment of the region's roadmap metrics, a summary of strategic power competition dynamics, a donor snapshot, and other political, economic, demographic, or technological factors critical to understanding the operating environment;
- The Regional Mission's priority focus areas for the new RDCS and preliminary strategic approaches with notional or illustrative programming for each focus area;
- The vision and priorities for the new RDCS and how they align with USAID's Policy Framework and other USAID and USG policies and priorities;
- Any new additions or shifts from the current RDCS, key lessons learned from the Phase Zero analytical agenda, and how this evidence helped inform the Regional Mission's vision for the proposed RDCS;
- Any relevant humanitarian and peace challenges in the region (and opportunities to harmonize programming and strengthen coherence around the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, as applicable);
- A baseline budget scenario and a brief narrative discussing, if applicable, any misalignment between the baseline budget scenario and the Regional Mission's strategic priorities (see **Section C** below);
- Staffing considerations, including specific limitations or gaps;
- Requests for support from USAID/W;
- The timeline for preparing the RDCS; and
- The timetable for completing additional analyses to be used to inform the RDCS.

### **C. Development of Budget Parameters and Baseline Budget Scenario**

Before the Phase One Presentation, Regional Missions must review the budget parameters provided by PLR's Office of Budget and Resource Management (BRM) for accuracy and flag any issues for discussion with the relevant Regional Bureau Program

Office and PLR. Regional Missions must use the budget parameters provided by PLR/BRM to establish a Phase One “baseline” budget scenario in alignment with local and regional priorities and the Administration’s and Agency’s goals.

PLR/BRM Parameters for Budget Scenarios: The Regional Bureau Program Office must reach out to PLR/BRM to request resource parameters for the Regional Mission’s baseline budget scenario. PLR/BRM must then provide historical funding levels for the Regional Mission that include topline and sector allocations. Budget parameters are scenarios prepared by PLR/BRM, in consultation with the relevant Regional Bureau Program Office, that Regional Missions must use to develop: a) a baseline budget scenario in Phase One; and b) an aspirational budget scenario in Phase Two (see **Section IV.C** for more information on the Aspirational Budget Scenario).

PLR/BRM must base these historical scenarios on a rolling average of budgets for three years. In consultation with the relevant Regional Bureau Program Office, PLR/BRM must calculate the scenarios in one of two ways using the most recent definitive levels available during parameter setting: (i) averages of the three most recent budget actuals or Section 653(a) report levels, as required by the Foreign Assistance Act as amended; or (ii) averages for two years of budget actuals or Section 653(a) report levels and the most recent Congressional Budget Justification (CBJ). The second method is typically appropriate in cases where the most recent CBJ significantly increased or decreased a Regional Mission’s allocation in line with Administration priorities. PLR/BRM must provide both calculations to the Regional Mission, with a copy to the Regional Bureau Program Office. In coordination with PLR/BRM and the relevant Regional Bureau Program Office, the Regional Mission must select which calculation method to use for the baseline scenario. PLR/BRM must provide Budget Parameters in an Excel budget table organized by the Standardized Program Structure and Definitions (SPSD) Objective and Area, and by relevant fiscal year.

Baseline Scenario: Using the PLR/BRM-provided budget parameters, the Regional Mission must then construct a “baseline” budget scenario in an Excel budget table by SPSD Objective and Area, and by relevant fiscal year. The baseline budget scenario may also include other recurring program funding, to capture what the Regional Mission may receive over the five-year period of the RDCS. Only the baseline budget scenario is required in Phase One.

#### **D. Washington Review of the Phase One Concept Presentation**

The Regional Mission must submit the draft Phase One Concept Presentation, which includes the baseline budget scenario, at least ten business days prior to the presentation, and the relevant Regional Bureau Program Office must share the Regional Mission’s draft Concept Presentation with the CDCS Review listserv (**[cdc-review@usaid.gov](mailto:cdc-review@usaid.gov)**) within one business day of receiving it from the Regional Mission. B/IO POCs should then distribute these documents within their B/IO and gather and consolidate internal responses using a comment tracker provided by the

Regional Bureau Program Office. Feedback from Washington B/IOs should reflect their B/IOs corporate position and not that of individuals. Washington B/IOs must provide input within five business days and provide no more than five comments that represent the most critical feedback. B/IOs that manage mandatory analyses (see **Section II.B**) are allowed to submit one additional comment that must be dedicated to that mandatory analysis. Those B/IOs must coordinate with the Regional Bureau POC for that mandatory analysis on the framing and content of that comment. B/IOs cannot package several unrelated questions or concerns into one comment. B/IOs that submit more than five comments or package several comments into one, will be asked to revise, pare back, and resubmit their feedback so the Regional Mission can more easily understand it and respond. The Regional Mission's designated primary reviewers should provide technical support and work with the Regional Bureau and Regional Mission to address comments. If a B/IO does not provide feedback within five business days, it is presumed to have no comments.

The Regional Bureau Program Office then has two business days to synthesize feedback on the Concept Presentation and, if necessary, coordinate discussions with the Regional Mission and the designated primary reviewers to clarify the feedback. The Regional Mission has three business days prior to the presentation to address feedback. Wherever possible, the Regional Mission should attempt to resolve any comments submitted by B/IOs prior to the Phase One Concept Presentation.

#### **E. Phase One Concept Presentation**

The objective of the Phase One Concept Presentation is to agree on the parameters for the RDCS. The Mission Director (or designee) and the Assistant Administrator (AA) for the relevant Regional Bureau (or designee) must co-chair, with the Assistant to the Administrator (AtA) for PLR (or designee) providing remarks. The Regional Bureau Program Office must invite POCs from relevant B/IOs, as well as other relevant internal USG stakeholders, which could include stakeholders from the U.S. Embassy and/or the Department of State.

If a Regional Mission was unable to address or resolve a comment with the relevant B/IO before the Phase One Concept Presentation, the Regional Mission should seek resolution during the presentation. If an issue cannot be resolved during the presentation or through discussions between the Regional Mission, Regional Bureau, and B/IO stakeholders, the formal Issues Resolution process described in **Section VII** must be initiated within ten business days following the Phase One Concept Presentation.

#### **F. Phase One Summary of Conclusions (SOC) Memo**

Phase One concludes with the drafting, circulation, and clearance of a Phase One SOC memo (see the [Phase One SOC template](#)). The purpose of the SOC is to provide documentation of the Phase One parameters and follow-up actions that will inform Phases Two and Three. The Phase One SOC should be no more than three

pages, and should not be a transcript of the meeting, but rather reflect key decisions and follow-up actions. Following the Concept Presentation, the Regional Mission, in consultation with the relevant Regional Bureau Program Office, must reconcile remaining concerns prior to the finalization of the SOC memo. The Phase One Concept Presentation slidedeck should also be attached to the SOC.

The SOC should summarize the following:

- Strategic Alignment and Policy/Strategy Considerations: A brief description of how the Regional Mission's strategic vision and priorities will advance locally led, inclusive development and prioritize among USAID's and the USG's overall foreign policy, economic, and development priorities. The [USAID Policy Framework Rubric](#) is a useful tool to determine how to make trade-offs among these priorities. This section should also highlight any notable collaboration and coordination with other donors or interagency partners, including the White House, the Department of State, or Department of Defense.
- Budget Parameters and Baseline Budget Scenario: A summary of the Regional Mission's budget parameters and Baseline Budget Scenario, including a preview of any proposed requests for relief from Congressional Directives the Regional Mission may request during Phase Two and any staffing considerations, if applicable.
- Washington Priorities and Feedback: Agreement on Washington B/IO priorities based on review of the slide deck and the Phase One presentation.
- Support from USAID/W: Agreement on critical support that B/IOs can provide to the Regional Mission, including with regards to analyses/assessments and the development of the Results Framework.
- Timeline: Reconfirm timeline for Phase Two and Phase Three, including whether a Phase Two presentation will be held.

The Regional Bureau Program Office is responsible for drafting the SOC and obtaining input and clearance from the Regional Mission. It then circulates the SOC memo for review and clearance to the designated primary B/IO stakeholders, including PLR/SPP and PLR/BRM, within three business days. Generally, final clearance should occur no more than five business days following the Phase One Concept Presentation, absent an Issues Resolution process per **Section VII**. Absent new funding, there should be no additional questions after Phase One about the main priorities or sectors of focus in which the Regional Mission is expected to work, since these decisions were approved in the Phase One SOC.

#### **IV. PHASE TWO: DEVELOPMENT OF THE RESULTS FRAMEWORK**

##### **A. Overview of Phase Two**

The objective of Phase Two is to gain consensus on the approaches the Regional Mission will use to advance foreign policy priorities, national security objectives, and locally led, inclusive, and sustainable development progress in the region given the parameters identified during Phase One. During Phase Two, the Regional Mission prepares its Results Framework (RF) Summary Paper, which includes initial development hypotheses for each identified RDO. During this phase, Regional Missions continue to engage with relevant bilateral Missions and Country Offices and local stakeholders to discuss strategic choices and priorities to ensure that the RDCS strengthens local and regional capacities and reinforces local and regional priorities.

This phase includes up to five milestones:

1. Development of the RF Summary Paper (see **Section IV.B**);
2. Development of the Aspirational Budget Scenario (see **Section IV.C**);
3. USAID/W review of the RF Summary Paper (see **Section IV.D**);
4. The Phase Two Presentation (Optional) (see **Section IV.E**); and
5. The Phase Two SOC memo (see **Section IV.F**).

During Phase Two, the Regional Mission and relevant Regional Bureau Program Office should collaborate with designated primary B/IO POCs that have critical equities. The Regional Mission should also consult with PLR/BRM after drafting its RF and before submitting the RF Summary Paper, to discuss any budgetary questions or concerns that emerge during Phase Two.

## **B. Development of the Results Framework Summary Paper**

The core Phase Two requirement and deliverable is the RF Summary Paper. The Regional Mission must submit the RF Summary Paper regardless of whether or not the Regional Mission will hold a Phase Two Presentation. The five-page RF Summary Paper is the basis for the final draft of the RDCS. The required budget scenarios and narrative, as described below, must be submitted by the Regional Mission alongside the RF Summary paper, but do not count toward the five-page limit. The Regional Mission must submit the RF Summary Paper to the relevant Regional Bureau Program Office for circulation no later than one month after the clearance of the Phase One SOC memo.

The RF Summary Paper articulates a proposed RDCS Goal and supporting RDOs. For each RDO, the RF Summary Paper provides a development hypothesis, citing the evidence underpinning the hypothesis, and a supporting narrative explaining how the proposed investments from USAID and others will collectively contribute to the RDOs and Intermediate Results (IRs). The RF Summary Paper must include the risks and assumptions that underpin those hypotheses.



A Special Objective (SpO) is a type of DO that can add coherence to USAID's work in a country or region, and help address time-bound, unprecedented regional urgencies and needs. Missions should work directly with the relevant Regional Program Office and PLR/SPP, to determine if a SpO is the right fit for the RDCS. It is up to the Mission's discretion in consultation with their Regional Bureau Program Office, if a SpO should contain a Development Hypothesis, IRs, or be included in the Performance Management Plan (PMP).

The RF also forms the basis of the Mission-wide PMP, which guides the monitoring, learning, reporting, and adapting that occurs throughout RDCS implementation. The Regional Mission must develop and submit the PMP within three months following the RDCS approval process (see [ADS 201.3.2.14](#)).

**The RF Summary Paper should include the following sections:**

1. RDCS Goal

- The RDCS Goal Statement is the highest-level result that a Regional Mission, together with the partner country governments, local actors, multilateral organizations, regional institutions, and other development and humanitarian partners, will advance. The supporting narrative explains how the RDCS Goal aligns with regional priorities, supports USAID and USG national security and other policy interests and strategies, and advances locally led, inclusive, sustainable development progress in the country.
- While USAID is not solely accountable for achieving the Goal, the RDCS Goal narrative should explain how USAID's strategic choices, in conjunction with efforts of other actors, advance that goal.

2. High Level Summary of Regional Context

- Describe the high-level operating environment, including key contextual drivers, such as: key political, economic, climate, social, security, gender, equity and inclusion, demographic, or technological factors; humanitarian and peace challenges; and how the context has changed since the last strategy or RDCS.

3. Strategic Approach

- Address how the Regional Mission plans to advance locally led, inclusive, sustainable development, and how the Regional Mission will leverage other political and financial resources from local actors, donors, foundations, or the private sector to amplify achievement of their development objectives.

- Describe how the RDCS aligns with priorities of partner countries across the region (and how those priorities vary, if applicable), the USAID Policy Framework, and other USG and USAID strategies, policies, and initiatives.
- Explain how this strategic approach and the proposed RDOs differ from the previous RDCS, citing the evidence and learning that influenced those shifts.

#### 4. Rationale for RDOs and IRs

- For each RDO:
  - Include a draft development hypothesis (IF/THEN) and a brief explanation of the logic and relationships between the IRs needed to advance the RDO;
  - Identify the risks and assumptions underpinning the development hypothesis (please see the [Managing Risk in the Program Cycle](#) ProgramNet page);
  - Identify opportunities to achieve long-lasting change that partner governments and local communities can sustain, including using development as a tool to further diplomacy by building goodwill and stronger alliances between the United States and our partner countries;
  - Specify the types of strategic partnerships required to achieve the RDO, including local institutions and actors, as well as new and underutilized partners; other donors involved in advancing the DO; other USAID Missions and Offices in the region; and relevant interagency actors including, if applicable, relevant civilian-military coordination and action within the partner nation;
  - Discuss learning priorities that arise from gaps in knowledge and evidence in the development hypotheses; and
  - Footnote or list sources of evidence (including cost-effectiveness analyses and impact evaluations that incorporate counterfactual analysis) that support the Regional Mission's development hypothesis.

#### 5. Updated Analyses and Evaluation Schedule

- Provide an update to the Phase One schedule for completing planned analyses and evaluations.

6. An RF diagram that follows the guidance in [ADS 201.3.2.11](#).
7. The baseline and aspirational budget scenarios and narrative.

See the [RDCS RF Summary Paper Template](#) for additional guidance.

### **C. Development of Budget Scenarios**

In Phase Two, Regional Missions must present the baseline budget scenario from Phase One, as well as develop an aspirational budget scenario and narrative. Regional Missions must develop these scenarios in alignment with regional context, Administration priorities, the Agency's goals, and the parameters agreed upon in Phase One. If the regional context or policy priorities have changed since Phase One and warrants a revision to anticipated resource levels, the Regional Mission should consult the relevant Regional Bureau Program Office and PLR/BRM analyst. In some cases it may be necessary to revise the baseline budget scenario.

**Baseline Budget Scenario:** Re-introduce the baseline budget scenario from Phase One and use it to inform the Phase Two RF Summary Paper. If the Regional Mission revised the Phase One budget, it must introduce the revised baseline budget in the RF Paper and (if applicable) the Phase Two Presentation.

**"Aspirational" Budget Scenario:** Using the agreed-upon Phase One baseline budget, in Phase Two the Regional Mission must develop an "aspirational" budget scenario. The aspirational budget scenario generally should not exceed 110 percent of the baseline budget scenario. The purpose is to record Regional Mission perspectives on the optimal distribution of funding based on the strategic priorities of its RDCS and administration priorities. The aspirational budget has the same format as the baseline budget and it must also be presented in an Excel budget table by SPSD Objective and Area, and by relevant fiscal year. If the Regional Mission is planning to transition out of one or more sectors, the Regional Mission must reflect the resources associated with this transition in its aspirational budget scenario. This scenario does not need to reflect current or anticipated Congressional Directives, as required for the baseline budget scenario. It should also include a breakout of funding in percentage terms by fiscal year, with the percentages being attributable to various directives or unattributed funding (e.g., 30 percent Agriculture, 25 percent BED, 20 percent Biodiversity, 25 percent unattributed) and totaling 100 percent.

**Associated Budget Narrative:** The Regional Mission must also develop a narrative that describes the differences between the two budget scenarios (baseline versus aspirational), how each scenario reflects (or fails to meet, in the case of the baseline budget scenario) the Regional Mission's objectives, and an explanation of the trade-offs made in each. Regional Missions must include this narrative as an annex to the Phase Two deliverables.

Exceptions on Budget: In extenuating circumstances, the Regional Mission can seek an exception for an aspirational budget level that exceeds 110 percent of the baseline budget scenario, if the Regional Mission expects a significant shift in the context or policy, which would lead to a real-world shift in resources during the lifetime of the RDCS. This shift could be due to events such as natural or human-driven disasters, adapting to political transitions, adopting new priorities, shifting development sectors, or any other event that would alter a Regional Mission's focus in a region (please note this list is not exhaustive). The Regional Mission must discuss the proposed topline increase by contacting their Regional Bureau Program Office who must then coordinate with the relevant PLR/BRM Analyst and the Strategy Team regional backstop (or designee) in PLR/SPP. The higher top-line level must be justified according to need and to the prospect for a real-world shift in resources during the lifetime of the RDCS. The Regional Mission must present the increased topline aspirational scenario in the Phase Two deliverables and formally document the increased topline in the Phase Two SOC.

#### **D. Washington Review of Results Framework Summary Paper**

The Regional Mission must submit its RF Summary Paper to the relevant Regional Bureau Program Office, who must then create a Comment Tracker to share with PLR and B/IO POCs. The Regional Bureau Program Office should also share the Phase One SOC for reference when they circulate the RF Summary Paper. B/IOs have five business days to review, gather internal feedback, and submit their comments (cleared at the B/IO-level) to the Regional Bureau Program Office via the Comment Tracker. If a B/IO does not provide comments within five business days, the B/IO is presumed to have no comments.

If the Regional Mission elects to host a Phase Two Presentation, the RF Summary Paper must be circulated for review at least ten business days before the scheduled presentation.

#### Categories of Comments

All B/IOs are required to classify their feedback as a “general comment,” a “concern,” or a “significant issue.” Only B/IOs designated as primary reviewers may raise significant issues.

1. “General Comments” are for general suggestions or positive feedback to Regional Missions.
2. “Concerns” reflect suggestions that would improve the clarity of the RDCS (e.g., an important technical clarification). Regional Missions are highly encouraged to consider but are not obligated to address “concerns” in the final RDCS.
3. “Significant issues” are issues that the Regional Mission must address in the Phase Two SOC and resolve before the Agency approves the RDCS. These are “redlines” regarding the logic or feasibility of a proposed strategic or technical approach, the alignment of the proposed approach with an Administration or

Agency policy or strategy, a particular focus that a policy/sector priority country must address, or compliance with this guidance. Significant issues must include actionable guidance or a recommended resolution, as well as proposed support that designated primary Washington B/IOs can offer, if appropriate, to address the issue. Even if a Regional Mission opts out of the Phase Two presentation, they are encouraged to engage the B/IOs that raise significant issues in order to reach a common understanding and mutually agree upon a resolution or way forward. The B/IO Deputy Assistant Administrator (DAA) must clear significant issues. Phase Two is USAID/W's last opportunity to raise significant issues. The only new significant issues that may be raised in Phase Three are those that are related to compliance with Phase Three requirements.

Key questions that Washington B/IOs should consider in their review and that, if not addressed properly, are examples of significant issues include, but are not limited to:

- To what extent does the RDCS Goal advance USAID and USG policy and strategic interests, support locally led development, and contribute to sustainable progress in the region?
- Does each development hypothesis explain how, why, and under what conditions, the Regional Mission believes it will be successful in advancing its RDOs through the proposed IRs? Are the IRs – for which USAID is accountable – feasible, measurable, and within USAID's manageable interest?
- Is the rationale for any proposed integrated or cross-sectoral RDOs clearly conveyed?
- Are the RDOs, IRs, assumptions, and risks based on evidence, best practice, and local knowledge and expertise?

B/IOs cannot submit more than five comments, nor can they combine several unrelated questions or concerns into one comment. However, B/IOs that manage mandatory analyses (see **Section II.B**) are allowed to submit one additional comment that must be dedicated to that mandatory analysis. Those B/IOs must coordinate with the Regional Bureau POC for that mandatory analysis on the framing and content of that comment. B/IOs that submit more than five comments or combine several unrelated comments into one, will be asked to revise, pare back, and resubmit their feedback so the Regional Mission can more easily understand it and respond. Regional Bureaus, in consultation with PLR, may also choose to reclassify B/IO feedback if the content does not align with the definitions above. The Regional Bureau Program Offices must inform B/IOs of any reclassification. PLR should mediate any disagreements.

The Regional Bureau Program Office must consolidate and review the feedback from Washington B/IO stakeholders within three business days and flag any concerns regarding issues that were raised or the reclassification of issues as necessary.

Review of the RF Summary Paper, the consolidation of Washington inputs, and the resolution of issues should take no more than ten business days (e.g., five days for review, three days to consolidate and classify comments, and two days to resolve outstanding significant issues, if necessary). For issues that cannot be resolved through discussions between the Regional Mission, Regional Bureau, and designated primary B/IO stakeholders, refer to the formal Issues Resolution process described in **Section VII** of this Mandatory Reference. PLR and the relevant Regional Bureau Program Office can downgrade a significant issue to a concern after negotiations have been concluded.

### **E. Phase Two Presentation (Optional)**

If a Regional Mission chooses to opt-out of the Phase Two presentation in Phase One, please skip this section and see the guidance that follows in **Section F**, for specifics on what the Phase Two Summary of Conclusions should address and the clearance process.

The objective of holding a Phase Two presentation is to have direct dialogue about the RF Summary Paper which is the basis for the final RDCS. While written feedback is a valuable part of the process, a Phase Two Presentation allows for a conversation between Washington and the Regional Mission about both the overall strategic direction of the RDCS and about specific approaches. The Phase Two presentation is often an efficient way to gain consensus from Regional Bureau AAs on strategic approaches and foreign policy priorities. The presentation is also a way to gain consensus on significant issues and concerns raised by designated primary B/IOs. Doing so can avoid delays in final approval of the RDCS caused by the time needed to interpret written feedback and hold any needed follow-up meetings.

For Regional Missions holding a Phase Two Presentation, the Mission Director (or designee) and the AA for the relevant Regional Bureau (or designee) must co-chair the presentation, with the AtA for PLR (or designee) providing remarks. The Regional Bureau must invite B/IO POCs identified in the Phase One SOC, in addition to PLR/SPP and PLR/BRM, and other stakeholders as relevant (which could include stakeholders from the U.S. Embassy and/or the Department of State).

During the presentation, the Regional Mission must present high-level information from their RF Summary Paper (see the [Phase Two slide deck template](#) for additional guidance). The slidedeck should include the following:

- A summary of the parameters that were identified in Phase One that informed the Regional Mission's approach;
- The RDCS Goal and how it aligns with regional priorities, and supports USAID and USG policy and strategic interests;
- An explanation of which proposed RDOs and IRs are different from those in the previous RDCS and the factors that motivated these shifts;

- RDO-specific slides that include the development hypothesis for each RDO; how the selected approach will advance locally led, inclusive, sustainable development; how other stakeholders will contribute to each RDO; and critical assumptions and risks;
- A summary of USAID/W's unresolved significant issues and the Regional Mission's responses, if applicable;
- The aspirational budget scenario, explaining how it represents a more optimal distribution of funding to address the strategic priorities of the RDCS and administration priorities, compared with the baseline budget scenario. The Regional Mission should discuss the trade offs and considerations made to arrive at the proposed levels and why adjustments would improve the Regional Mission's ability to implement the RDCS; and
- The planned completion date for the RDCS, next steps, and any additional USAID/W or other support needed to complete the RDCS in a timely manner.

Following the Phase Two Presentation, the Regional Mission, in consultation with the relevant Regional Bureau Program Office, must reconcile remaining issues prior to the finalization of the Phase Two SOC memo. Wherever possible, the Regional Mission should discuss and resolve any comments submitted by B/IOs prior to the presentation. In the event that a Regional Mission is unable to address or resolve a significant issue with the designated primary B/IO during this period, the Regional Mission should seek resolution during the presentation. The Regional Bureau must submit the issues that cannot be resolved through discussions between the Regional Mission, Regional Bureau, and B/IO stakeholders to the formal Issues Resolution process described in **Section VII** of this Mandatory Reference within ten business days following the Phase Two Presentation.

#### **F. Phase Two Summary of Conclusions Memo**

Phase Two concludes with the drafting, circulation, and clearance of a Phase Two SOC memo (see the [Phase Two SOC template](#)). The Regional Bureau Program Office is responsible for drafting the SOC and obtaining input and clearance from the Regional Mission. The cleared Phase Two SOC represents Agency endorsement of the Regional Mission's proposed strategic approach and RF, and authorizes the Regional Mission to proceed with developing the final RDCS. The SOC memo should be no more than four pages, excluding annexes, and it must address the following decision points:

- Goal, Regional Development Objectives, and Strategic Priorities: Agreement on the draft Goal, RDOs, and strategic priorities, or B/IO recommendations to revise for the final strategy.



- Shifts in Strategic Approach/Programming: Agreement on final decisions on any major shifts in strategic approaches and programming, including transitioning in or out of sectors, if applicable.
- Significant Issues and Resolution: The Regional Mission's responses to and agreed upon resolution of any significant issues raised during Phase Two.
- Budget Parameters: A summary of the RDCS' budget parameters, including discussions regarding any relief from Congressional Directives as well as trade-off considerations, if applicable.
- Timeline: Any updates to the timeline for completing the RDCS.

**For Regional Missions holding a Phase Two Presentation**, the Regional Bureau Program Office must prepare and circulate the SOC memo within five business days after the presentation. Final approval of the SOC should occur no more than ten business days after the presentation, absent an issues resolution process as outlined in **Section VIII**.

**For Regional Missions who do not hold a Phase Two Presentation**, the Regional Bureau Program Office should prepare and circulate the SOC memo within ten business days after the closing of the Phase Two RF Summary Paper comment period. Final approval of the SOC should occur no more than five business days after all issues have been resolved, absent any issues resolution process as outlined in **Section VIII**.

After the Regional Mission clears the Phase Two SOC, the Regional Bureau Program Office must circulate the SOC to PLR/SPP, PLR/BRM, and any other designated primary B/IO stakeholders for clearance. All B/IOs should refer to the Comment Tracker to review the Regional Mission's responses to comments, concerns, and significant issues raised.

Designated primary B/IOs must provide clearance of or offer substantive feedback on the SOC within three business days. If a B/IO or designee does not provide clearance or offer substantive comments within three business days, the B/IO is presumed to have provided clearance by default. Once cleared by the relevant Regional Bureau Program Office and PLR/SPP, the Regional Bureau Program Office should circulate the final, cleared SOC to the Regional Mission, other Regional Bureau colleagues, PLR/BRM, and other primary reviewers.

## **V. PHASE THREE: PREPARATION AND APPROVAL OF AN RDCS**

### **A. Overview of Phase Three**

The objective of Phase Three is to prepare and approve the full RDCS, which represents Agency endorsement of the Regional Mission's focus and chosen strategic approach. The final draft must include all required elements of the RDCS as described

in the [ADS 201mbh, Outline for Standard Regional/Country Development Cooperation Strategies](#), including all required annexes and any optional annexes. The full RDCS should be no more than 20 pages (not including annexes). Phase Three culminates in the final approval of the RDCS by the relevant Regional Bureau AA and PLR's AtA, and subsequent dissemination of the RDCS.

Phase Three includes the following milestones:

1. Development of the first draft of the full RDCS (see **Section V.B**);
2. USAID/W review of the draft RDCS (see **Section V.C**);
3. Submission of the final RDCS (see **Section V.D**); and
4. Final approval of the RDCS (see **Section V.E**).

#### **B. Development of the First Draft of the Full RDCS**

The Regional Mission must develop a first draft of the full RDCS that further refines and expands upon the RF Summary Paper. The Regional Mission must take into account feedback from review of the Phase Two RF Summary Paper as documented in the Phase Two SOC, modifying the RDO or IR language if necessary, including key risks and assumptions, and significant knowledge gaps. If a Regional Mission refines its RDOs or IRs in Phase Three, this does not require going back to Phase Two for an additional review.

Regional Missions are encouraged to review notes from Phase Two Results Framework workshops, revalidate initial policy alignment conversations, and, if appropriate, confer with bilateral USAID Missions and Offices in the region and relevant interagency actors during Phase Three. The Regional Mission must submit the full draft (including required annexes) to the relevant Regional Bureau Program Office at least five weeks before the expected approval of the RDCS.

#### **C. Washington Review of the RDCS Draft**

Once the Regional Mission has submitted its first draft of the full RDCS, the Regional Bureau Program Office must circulate the draft, along with the Phase Two Comment Tracker and the Phase Two SOC, to PLR/SPP, PLR/BRM, and those primary designated B/IOs that raised significant issues during Phase Two. B/IOs that submitted significant issues must then refer back to the Phase Two tracker and assess whether or not the significant issue was resolved in the draft, and submit feedback to the Regional Bureau Program Office within five business days of receiving the draft RDCS. If a B/IO does not provide feedback within five business days, the B/IO is presumed to have no comments.

No new significant issues may be raised during Phase Three, unless they are related

to compliance with the guidance for Phase Three described in this mandatory reference. For example, if the draft is missing any content required in the RDCS Outline, including content required for the mandatory annexes, PLR or the Regional Bureau Program Office may flag the omission as a new significant issue.

The Regional Bureau Program Office must consolidate and review comments from B/IOs, flag any concerns, and, if needed, facilitate further consultations between the relevant bilateral Missions, Regional Mission, and designated primary B/IOs to resolve any outstanding significant issues. Occasionally, disagreements between the Regional Bureau and other B/IOs may persist at the working level over a particular significant issue. In these cases, the B/IO that submitted the issue may re-submit the significant issue after obtaining the endorsement of the relevant DAA (or Director, if an Independent Office) or designee, who must affirm that the issue represents a significant priority of the B/IO. If, after this, agreement still is not possible within five business days of the Regional Bureau receiving the Comment Tracker, then the Regional Bureau must submit the issue for resolution through the Issues Resolution process per **Section VII** of this Mandatory Reference.

Review of the draft RDCS and consolidation of Washington inputs should take approximately ten business days.

#### **D. Submission of the Final RDCS**

The Regional Mission has two weeks to incorporate final comments, if any, and make necessary revisions to the draft RDCS, including any substantive changes to the required budget, adaptive management, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Collaborating Learning and Adapting (MECLA), and climate analysis annexes. It must then submit the final RDCS to the Regional Bureau Program Office for approval.

#### **E. Final Approval of a RDCS**

The Regional Bureau Program Office must circulate the final RDCS along with an Action Memorandum to PLR and any other designated primary B/IOs that raised significant issues during Phase Two for clearance. The Action Memorandum must specify the expiration date of the RDCS and the proposed timing of any expected check-ins with USAID/W during RDCS implementation, including an estimated date for the mid-course stocktaking exercise. Designated primary B/IOs must provide clearance or offer any substantive comments on significant issues within three business days. If a B/IO does not provide clearance within three business days, the B/IO is presumed to have provided clearance by default. After PLR and any designated primary B/IOs have cleared the RDCS, the Regional Bureau Program Office must submit the package for final approval by the Regional Bureau AA and the PLR AtA. The Regional Bureau AA and PLR AtA, or their designees, must approve the final internal RDCS within three business days.

### **VI. POST APPROVAL: DISSEMINATION OF THE RDCS**

Within 30 business days of RDCS approval, Regional Missions must prepare and format final internal and external versions of their RDCS for posting on USAID websites. These must be 508-compliant before sending them to Washington. The Regional Bureau Communications team should provide additional assistance to Regional Missions on 508 compliance.

- **Internal Version:** Regional Missions must submit the version approved at the end of the RDCS process to the Regional Bureau for posting on the Agency’s internal websites, [ProgramNet](#) and [myUSAID](#), which are only viewable by USAID staff. These websites can host RDCSs that contain Sensitive But Unclassified (SBU) information. PLR/SPP leads in posting the internal RDCSs on ProgramNet.
- **External Version:** Regional Missions must prepare a modified version of their full RDCS that does not include any SBU information for posting on the external USAID websites, [USAID.gov](#) and the [Development Experience Clearinghouse \(DEC\)](#). These websites are viewable by the general public and can host versions of approved RDCSs that are unclassified and approved for public release. Regional Missions must submit their external version to the relevant Regional Bureau AA (or their designee) for approval before submitting it for posting. PLR/SPP and the PLR Communications Team are responsible for posting external RDCSs to USAID.gov, and Regional Missions are responsible for posting the external RDCS on the DEC.

Regional Missions must format the internal and external versions of their final RDCS in accordance with these requirements:

Category	Internal Version	External Version
<b>Content</b>	The “internal” version is the full RDCS document with all required annexes that is approved at the end of the RDCS process.	The “external” version excludes any sensitive content. For supplemental guidance on the process for clearing and publishing the Climate Annexes, see <a href="#">ADS 201mat, Climate Variability and Climate Change in USAID’s Regional and Country Development Strategies and Strategic Frameworks</a> . All other annexes contain SBU information and therefore cannot be publicly disseminated.

<b>Header/Footer</b>	Regional Missions must mark the header and footer on all pages of the internal version as “Sensitive But Unclassified.”	Regional Missions must mark the cover page of the external version as follows: 1) “Unclassified” in the header; and 2) “Approved for Public Release” in the footer.
<b>Section 508 compliance</b>	Regional Missions must ensure that internal and external versions of their RDCS are compliant with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act ( <a href="#">29 U.S.C. § 794d</a> ). Regional Bureau Communications teams should provide additional assistance to Regional Missions on 508 compliance.	
<b>Cover Page</b>	Regional Missions must use one of the approved templates for Cover Pages in <a href="#">this document</a> .	
<b>Overall Branding, including logo, colors, typeface, and photography</b>	Regional Missions must ensure that the USAID logo, colors, typeface, and photography in both versions of its RDCS conform to standards established in the <a href="#">USAID Graphic Standards Manual and Partner Co-Branding Guide</a> .	
<b>File Name</b>	Regional Missions must use the following naming convention:  Internal-SBU-RDCS-Country-Month-Year of Expiration	Regional Missions must use the following naming convention:  RDCS-Country-Month-Year of Expiration

For additional guidance on the requirements for formatting final versions of a RDCS and the associated process for posting these versions on internal and external USAID websites, see [Posting Internal and External Strategies on USAID Websites](#).

## VII. ISSUES RESOLUTION PROCESS

In the event that the Regional Mission, relevant Regional Bureau, and designated primary B/IO cannot come to agreement on a significant issue within five business days during any of the three phases according to **Sections III.E, IV.C, or V.C**, the B/IO’s AA must escalate the issue as described below:

- If, after five business days of negotiation between the DAAs, agreement has not been reached on the significant issue, the AA or designee of the B/IO that has the significant issue must contact the relevant Regional Bureau AA, Regional Bureau Program Office, and the Strategy Team regional backstop (or designee) in PLR/SPP to schedule a mediated discussion.

- PLR/SPP's Strategy Team regional backstop (or designee) must then schedule a meeting, mediated by PLR, no more than five business days after the initial request. Relevant Regional Mission POCs should also be invited to the meeting.
- During the meeting, the Regional Bureau AA and the AA of the B/IO that has the significant issue must make recommendations on a resolution.
- If concurrence is achieved on a resolution, the PLR/SPP Strategy Team regional backstop (or designee) should document the agreed-upon resolution in an Information Memorandum within five business days, cleared by the issue owner's AA and the Regional Bureau AA, which becomes part of the Regional Mission's RDCS file.
- If the Regional Bureau AA and the AA of the B/IO that has a significant issue do not concur on a resolution, they may alternatively draft a Split Memorandum to the Deputy Administrator for Policy and Programming, as outlined below:
  - The issue owner B/IO and Regional Bureau should each draft their part of a Split Memorandum within five business days of the mediated discussion.
  - The PLR/SPP Strategy Team regional backstop (or designee) must draft an annex to the Split Memorandum that documents the mediated discussion and recommends a resolution; the PLR AtA must approve this Annex.
  - The PLR/SPP regional backstop must then submit the Split Memorandum to the Deputy Administrator for Policy and Programming for a final decision. The Deputy Administrator for Policy and Programming must return a decision to the issue owner B/IO, Regional Bureau, and PLR within five business days. The Split Memorandum that contains the Deputy Administrator for Policy and Programming's decision becomes part of the Regional Mission's RDCS file.

If all possible negotiations have been exhausted, PLR/SPP and the Regional Bureau Program Office can downgrade a significant issue.

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