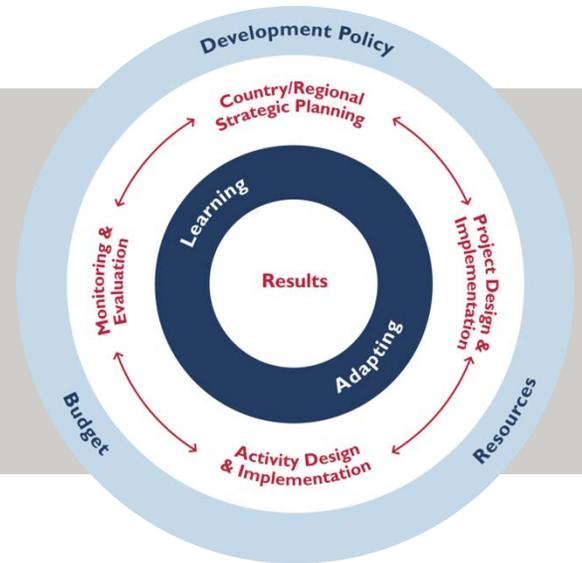# PROGRAM CYCLE

Discussion Note:

Co-Creation Additional Help

EXTERNAL VERSION

This Note describes how to design USAID activities using co-creation methods.

Discussion Notes explore principles or methods related to the Program Cycle and are intended to prompt inquiry. This Note was developed by the Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning (PPL) in consultation with the Office of Acquisition and Assistance (M/OAA) and the Global Development Lab.

Introduction: Co-Creation in USAID's Program Cycle

The purpose of this Discussion Note is to share practical approaches on how to design USAID activities using co-creation methods. This Discussion Note recognizes that many Missions are experimenting with approaches to co-creation and seeks to stimulate new ideas to deepen USAID's engagement with partners and key stakeholders during the design of development programming.

Co-creation can help support the key principles that serve as the foundation of USAID's Program Cycle. By involving local organizations, the private sector, traditional USAID implementing partners, local experts, and host country government officials during the co-creation process, co-creation can greatly enhance opportunities for increasing local ownership of USAID programming. Co-creation can also lower the programmatic risk that USAID won't achieve the intended results because the activity design and implementation will be informed by engagement with a broader array of stakeholders. The project and activity design guidance in ADS 201 emphasizes that USAID design teams "are encouraged to incorporate approaches that support innovation, co-creation, and/or co-design" when appropriate.
(ADS 201.3.3.7)

This discussion note highlights that there are many enabling paths for co-creation, whether through acquisition or assistance procedures, government-to-government (G2G) agreements, or public-private partnerships. The note also explores implications that a co-creation process may have on activity implementation, monitoring, evaluation and learning.

What is co-creation?

Co-creation is a design approach that **brings people together to collectively produce a mutually valued outcome, using a participatory process that assumes some degree of shared power and decision-making**. It is a time-limited process that focuses on generating a specific outcome. Co-creation is a technique that can be used at various points throughout the Program Cycle.

Co-creation, as a practice, is not new at USAID. It has figured prominently in our work with the private sector, host governments, and other bilateral and multilateral organizations for many years. However, more commonly, activity design processes at USAID often use a more static solicitation and proposal response process where USAID drafts an activity solicitation with restricted collaboration with outside partners, actors, and experts due to procurement sensitivities. A co-creation approach during activity design allows USAID to more deliberately involve others in problem identification and ensure that activities are better informed by local context with increased ownership by other development actors.

There has been a revival and reimagining of how co-creation might be used more broadly in our programming of specific activities in order to advance Agency priorities, informed largely by recent experimentation with the Broad Agency Announcement (BAA). Therefore, the Bureau of Policy, Planning, and Learning (PPL) collaborated with the Global Development Lab and the Office of Acquisition and Assistance (M/OAA) to develop this Discussion Note to provide additional insights and recommendations to guide the Agency's application of co-creation approaches.

For clarity and operational simplicity, the scope of this Discussion Note focuses on activity-level co-creation. Although this document focuses on co-creation of activities, Missions and Operating Units are encouraged to experiment with collaborative and participatory design processes at other points in the Program Cycle (*See Side Box below: Collaboration along the Program Cycle*).

This Discussion Note does not distinguish between "co-creation" and "co-design," choosing instead to use "co-creation" as an umbrella term describing collaborative design and development of USAID activities. USAID continues to encourage experimentation with different processes and concepts related to co-creation and co-design and expects these distinctions to continue to evolve.

Collaboration along the Program Cycle

Activity-level co-creation is one type of the broader collaboration efforts that USAID staff engage in throughout the USAID Program Cycle. Collaboration should take place at the strategy level when USAID consults with key stakeholders or government counterparts as they develop their strategy; during project design processes as design teams collaborate with stakeholders to better understand a given context or problem; or as USAID monitors, evaluates, and learns from its development programs. While this discussion note focuses on specific methods for co-creation at the activity-level, it is important to emphasize that collaboration along the Program Cycle with key stakeholders, development actors, and beneficiaries, as well as among teams at USAID is critical to the success of USAID programs.
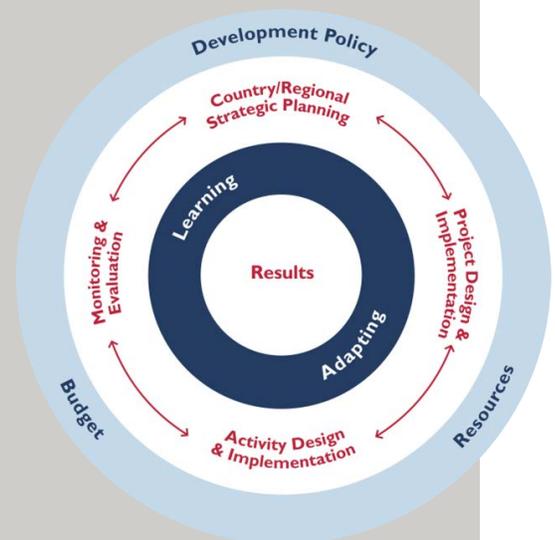
Why and When is Co-Creation Appropriate?

Co-creation creates a unique collaboration space characterized by shared ownership and decision-making. It is most often used to engage with more diverse stakeholders toward better activity design than is typical under USAID's current processes and procedures. It can be a useful tool for better understanding the problem to be solved, both in terms of generating a more nuanced and robust understanding of a problem or context and in establishing a shared framing and definition of the problem to enable coordinated strategy and problem-solving.

This approach also makes it easier to identify opportunities for innovation and systems change. Through mutual engagement and problem-solving, co-creation offers a valuable platform for forging new network connections, coalitions that cut across traditional silos, and partnerships to advance specific actions and agenda. The diverse, and sometimes conflicting, perspectives brought together through collaborative brainstorming and problem-solving often produce more fit-for-purpose solutions and/or out-of-the-box ideas that have greater potential for breakthrough change. Finally, when there is shared conversation and ownership, the group benefits from quick feedback about the viability of ideas, enabling rapid prototyping and iteration, and the potential for each participant to contribute their particular expertise and resources is clearer.

In addition, co-creation has the potential to bring a greater quantity or quality of resources to bear on activities. When partners are involved in building a solution, they are more likely to feel ownership and commitment, often leading to greater and/or smarter allocation of resources. Better understanding the problem at hand and the planned solution also allows partners to make more informed decisions about the type of resources necessary to carry out the solution. For example, a co-creation process focused on improving the production of rice and diversified crops in Bangladesh enabled better selection of an appropriate chief of party and other key personnel for the implementers and involved them in the joint design of the program description, leading to a more tailored and mutually-understood implementation plan and budget.

Based on current experience, co-creation is most effective and appropriate under certain conditions:

- **Characteristics of the problem and existing solutions:** Co-creation is most appropriate when no single organization has sufficient expertise or perspective to solve a particular problem effectively, or major stakeholders do not share a common understanding of the problem, or barriers to solving it. It can open up a new way of thinking about which solution(s) or approach(es) can best solve a problem, so is best used when there is not already a well-established and agreed-upon solution. It can also be valuable when there is a low level of coordination across system actors, inadequate ownership over commitment to current solutions, or limited integration of local or end-user interests and needs into the current solutions.

- **Stakeholder characteristics:** Co-creation works best when participants are able and willing to share their expertise and ideas openly in a creative and back-and-forth manner, and they have a clear interest in and commitment to achieving the desired outcome. The diversity of perspective and expertise involved is a key strength of co-creation, but participants must be willing to work toward common ground and be responsive to feedback from others. Therefore, a basic foundation of trust and mutual accountability is essential. Participants who are used to having a lot of decision-making power must adjust to a realigned power dynamic and be prepared to work more inclusively.

Common Variations and Elements in Co-Creation Approaches

A co-creation approach frequently used at USAID is the multi-stakeholder workshop, but its form can and does vary. Other types of co-creation have included a structured one-on-one collaboration between USAID and a current or potential implementer; donor-to-donor or private-sector co-creation of a common investment agenda; and small high-level strategy sessions with a specific geographic or interest-based community. Users should carefully consider what format and structure will best match the activity's objectives.

Many of USAID's current co-creation activities are carried out as part of a procurement process. Some occur as part of an Annual Program Statement/ Notice of Funding Opportunity (APS/NOFO), but other procurement options may be used, including a Broad Agency Announcement (BAA) process, or multi-stage Request for Application/Notice of Funding Opportunity (RFA/NOFO). See below for more discussion about different enabling paths. We recommend that USAID design teams speak to a procurement specialist early and often in the co-creation process to determine the best path.

Co-creation can also be done outside of a procurement process to inform potential future programming or as part of an existing funding mechanism, depending on its structure. For example, USAID can use its convening power to facilitate networking, expertise-sharing, and partnering among potential implementers, innovators, grassroots organizations, influential investors, stakeholders, and/or other experts while encouraging them to explore opportunities for collaboration. Some offices have structured awards specifically to enable and promote co-creation among local partners and communities as part of ongoing implementation.

Recently, Missions and Operating Units have increasingly been experimenting with multi-stakeholder workshops or events to co-create around a development challenge. The USAID Global Development Lab has developed a step-by-step guide to the common elements of a multi-stakeholder co-creation event, from planning to learning capture. There is no one-size fits all plan for co-creation, but the following key steps are integral to implementing a successful co-creation event:

1. **Setting objectives:** Clear objectives are crucial, not only to designing a useful co-creation workshop, but also to generating buy-in to the process among partners. These objectives reflect the topical focus and outcomes, and also what you hope to achieve by choosing co-creation as an approach compared to other options.

2. **Selecting and recruiting participants:** Consider who needs to be "in the room" to achieve your objectives. If you have a sense of the type of participant you want (e.g. subject matter experts) but do not know who to involve specifically, you must do some basic research to develop a list of potentially interested actors.

3. **Preparing for the co-creation event:** Research and design the event that will bring together the targeted participants.

4. **Run the co-creation event(s):** Successful co-creation events benefit from having a clear introduction, problem definition stage, solution ideation stage, concept development stage, and purposeful reflection on the process and outcomes.

5. **Follow up, finalize and enact the action plan:** In the weeks following an event, there is typically a need for follow-up communication and developing or refining an action plan.

6. **Reflect:** There are multiple learning capture options your team may want to consider after a co-creation process. At a minimum, we recommend surveying participants at the end of an event to guide next steps in the co-creation and build your Mission's knowledge about what works best and least well.

Enabling Paths for Co-Creation at the Activity level

There are a range of mechanisms and solicitation methods that allow space for USAID activity design teams to pursue co-creation. While the options presented below are not exhaustive, they represent a wide range of mechanism types, from acquisition, to assistance, to government-to-government agreements where co-creation can be integrated into the design process. In all cases, the approaches to engaging with stakeholders may vary so it is important that activity design teams work closely with their AO/CO and Resident Legal Officers (RLOs) at the earliest stages of design. This discussion note provides an overview of the following paths for co-creation:

I.   Annual Program Statement (APS) - Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)
II.   Broad Agency Announcement (BAA)
III.   Government-to-Government (G2G) Agreement
IV.   Industry Day (pre- or mid-solicitation)
V.   Pre-solicitation Request for Information (RFI) and Open Ideation Platforms
VI.   Public International Organization (PIO) Awards and Grants with Bilateral Donors
VII.   Request for Application (RFA) - Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)

Avoiding Organizational Conflicts of Interest (OCI) in Co-Creation

While USAID has great latitude to engage in co-creation, it is still important to ensure that we do not create an unfair competitive advantage to any entity. This unfair competitive advantage could arise at the time that we issue a solicitation to award a contract or assistance agreement based on the co-creation. It is critical to ensure that all potential implementing partners have access to equal information. If any non-public information is disclosed during co-creation, that same information must be made available in the solicitation. It is also important that the solicitation is not written in a way that unfairly benefits any one partner who participated in co-creation. For instance, the solicitation should not include a requirement for a specific methodology that only one partner can achieve, unless it is documented that the requirement is necessary for the activity. In all cases, working closely with your RLO/GC and OAA is crucial to ensuring the co-creation process is engaging partners with the appropriate level and type of information.

I. Annual Program Statement (APS)/Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)

In accordance with ADS 303.3.5.2, APS/NOFO is an announcement for a specific funding opportunity used when USAID intends to support a variety of creative approaches towards developing methodologies to assess and implement development objective activities. When used, USAID will publish an APS at least once a year, either with an open-ended response time or a closing date of at least six months after issuance. An APS will only result in an assistance mechanism.

How can this approach enable co-creation?

Because of the rolling nature of proposals in an APS process, it leaves open the ability to co-create with applicants. The activity design team can tailor an APS co-creation approach to co-create one-on-one with an applicant or to co-create with multiple applicants as a group to potentially develop a consortium of correlated activities. Co-creation can be incorporated into the selection process where USAID and the apparently successful applicant (ASA) co-create the final program description for an activity. Co-creation can also be incorporated into the selection process where multiple applicants are brought together to co-create an activity or activities. This approach can result in many creative approaches to tackle a development problem.

Where to go for more resources

- Example: Development Innovation Ventures (DIV) APS
- Global Development Alliance (GDA) Annual Program Statement.

Global Development Alliance APS

One flagship model for co-creation under an APS is USAID's Global Development Alliance (GDA) Annual Program Statement (APS) which helps the private sector and USAID work together to advance core business interests and achieve sustainable development impact. The GDA APS is an invitation to prospective partners to work side-by-side with USAID and other interested organizations to build transformational partnerships that foster and leverage market-based approaches to solve critical business and development challenges. The GDA APS invites the private sector—and organizations committed to engaging the private sector—to work with USAID to discuss our respective interests and objectives, determine how those interests align, and jointly identify and define problems, challenges, and opportunities we can most effectively address by working together. By working with USAID, the private sector more effectively advances and achieves a wide variety of vital business interests. By working with the private sector, USAID increases the reach, efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainable impact of development assistance.

How can this approach enable co-creation?

The GDA APS stresses and requires co-creation. The APS provides substantive guidance on engagement and collaboration, as well as processes that ensure such co-creation efforts. The GDA APS is grounded in Acquisition and Assistance Policy Directive (AAPD) 04–16, which states that alliances "are partnerships, not procurements" and supports robust communication and collaboration with prospective alliance partners.

Applicants for funding under the GDA APS must connect USAID to the private sector partner before they develop or submit a concept paper. This enables USAID to collaborate and co-create with the private sector from the outset, at the earliest stages of problem identification and definition. It also establishes the foundation upon which co-creation and collaboration continues throughout the alliance development process and the subsequent implementation of activities that advance the objectives of the alliance.

In addition to ensuring linkages between USAID and the private sector, prospective applicants for funding under the GDA APS must engage the private sector in the design and development of prospective alliance ideas. Concept papers and proposed alliances that fail to demonstrate and reflect such engagement and co-creation do not move forward under the GDA APS process.

Once a qualifying concept paper has been submitted, all prospective partners to the alliance continue the co-creation and collaboration process to further develop the alliance, design the activities that will help achieve the results desired under the alliance, identify and incorporate additional partners, and determine respective roles and responsibilities related to the implementation of those activities and other endeavors under the alliance.

USAID Missions and Washington Operating Units can also issue addenda under the GDA APS. Such addenda can be jointly developed with the private sector and other partners.

USAID's Center for Transformational Partnerships provides extensive resources and guidance on private sector engagement and the GDA APS as a co-creation asset. For additional information, please contact the GDA APS Activity Manager at gda@usaid.gov.

II. Broad Agency Announcement (BAA)

BAAs may be used by agencies to fulfill Research & Development (R&D) requirements for scientific study and experimentation directed toward advancing the state-of-the-art or increasing knowledge or understanding rather than focusing on a specific system or hardware solution. The BAA technique will only be used when meaningful proposals with varying technical/scientific approaches can be reasonably anticipated. Broad Agency Announcements are issued under Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR) 35.016 and should not be confused with FAR Part 15 processes and procedures (see FAR 35/15/8 Comparison Chart). BAAs can also be categorized under Other Competitive Procedures found in FAR 6.102(d)(2).

The USAID BAA is four stage process from the expression of interest to award.

- In stage one, USAID seeks expressions of interest around the targeted research or development idea and reviews and selects concepts that will move on to stage two.
- In stage two, USAID and the potential partner(s) will collaborate on a concept paper. It is during this phase of co-creation that the parties will begin to determine additional partners and resources to complement the activity. Selected potential partners then participate in a co-creation workshop, conference, meeting, or another method designated by USAID, to work together with all invitees to further develop the idea presented in the expression of interest.
- In stage three, concept papers developed during stage two will be reviewed by the Peer and Scientific Review Board, comprised of experts from USAID, partners, and/or outside parties. The Peer and Scientific Review Board will review Concept Papers and recommend which applicants should be considered Apparently Successful Partners to the Contracting/Agreement Officer.
- In stage four, the Contracting/Agreement Officer engages in the final review, negotiation, and determination of instrument types, responsibility, cost reasonableness, etc., and will craft an award instrument with the Apparently Successful Partner(s).

How can this approach enable co-creation?

Because concepts received as a result of the BAA process are evaluated through a peer or scientific review board, they are not evaluated against each other or against a common work statement [FAR 35.016(d)], and are open to take a creative approach on how concepts get from A (submission) to B (award). This approach also results in receiving different creative approaches towards a problem or challenge. Knowing this information, the Agency can experiment with co-creation and incorporate it into the BAA process.

Helpful Considerations:

- Consider the resources required if doing a multi-stakeholder workshop as a full scale co-creation workshop can be a heavy logistical lift if it is being conducted with multiple parties.

- Ensure expectations are laid out in the BAA regarding co-creation and after the expression of interest (EOI) (stage 1) process, also consider doing a video to explain the process and lay out expectations early.

- Refer organizations to the intellectual property section of the BAA early on and re-emphasize it throughout to ensure clarity.

- Co-creation through a BAA can only be done for R&D activities.

III. Government-to-Government (G2G) Agreement

Co-creation between USAID and a partner country government is approached as an equal partnership in which activities are co-created and co-designed to leverage the commitment, resources, expertise and ownership of the partner country governments. When selecting and negotiating the most appropriate G2G mechanism, USAID must consider the capacities of its partners, both to deliver and to monitor, as well as risks associated with the implementation of activities. The Public Financial Management Risk Assessment Framework (PFMRAF) process defined in ADS 220 and other related analyses assist project design teams in determining when and where such mechanisms would be appropriate.

Such analyses inform the design teams about strengths and gaps within the partner country government, which can be used as leverage points to mitigate risks associated with implementation of activities. Governmental agencies in partner countries generally play important roles within the local system and the partner government's ability to perform their defined responsibilities is an essential contribution to sustaining development efforts. The co-creation process allows both USAID and the partner country to review findings of such analyses and co-create activities that not only strengthen the partner country government capacity to deliver the services and successfully implement the mutually agreed activities, but at the same time improve the business processes of the partner country such as procurement, financial management, budgeting and monitoring for performance. The Controller and the Mission's RLO play a very critical role in assessing partner country capacities to implement our activities and advise the design teams on opportunities to leverage strengths or mitigating risks associated with gaps or weak capacities.

How can this approach enable co-creation?

The co-creation process, using open communication and collaboration, is central to designing G2G agreements. Shared power and decision making enables USAID and partner governments to co-create and implement a project or activity based on mutually agreed objectives. Design and implementation of G2G agreements require negotiation and trust and provides a mechanism to incorporate local perspectives and make continuous decisions with our partner government on where to focus efforts and resources. The participatory process allows USAID to invest in the partner government's own priorities or align our priorities with the partner government. USAID staff should consult with their RLO as they embark on co-creating a G2G agreement to ensure they understand the process and parameters for co-creation.

Helpful Considerations:

Certain strategic and design considerations that are particular to providing direct assistance to partner governments include the following:

- Ensure the analytical requirements for G2G (PFMRAF Stage 1 and 2) are satisfied prior to embarking on co-creating G2G agreements.

- Consider the fiduciary risks associated with providing funds to sovereign states and reputational risks associated with governments that have democratic accountability weaknesses.

- Design teams will need to select the appropriate funding mechanisms to achieve programmatic results that consider the capacities of the partner country government systems.

Where to go for more resources:

- ADS 220 and ADS 201.3.4.6: Partner Country Agreement Design

IV. Industry Day (pre- or mid-solicitation)

An industry day is an event held by an activity design team to exchange information with industry and other stakeholders about current or future procurements. For the purpose of this document, the term "industry" refers to potential acquisition and assistance implementing partners and private sector actors. An industry day can include topics such as the Mission's overarching strategic or project priorities, procurement strategy, feasibility of the requirement, or evaluation criteria. "Industry Day" is an acquisition term but the principles described in this section can also be applied in assistance.

How can this approach enable co-creation?

FAR 15.201 outlines exchanges with industry before receipt of proposals and provides broad latitude for co-creation before receipt of proposals. An industry day can be tailored to bring interested parties together to co-create a Statement of Objectives, a Statement of Work or Evaluation Factors that will go directly into a solicitation and then follow USAID's normal procurement process. An industry day can also be tailored to facilitate the co-creation of potential industry teaming partnerships that include local or non-traditional partners.

Where to go for more resources:

- USAID Procurement Executive Bulletin No. 2016-03, Communication with Partners during the Acquisition & Assistance Process
- Advancing Government Through Collaboration, Education & Action Industry Day Best Practices - AM SIG 12-2014
- AcqNotes Industry Day

V. Pre-solicitation Request for Information (RFI) and Open Ideation Platforms

An RFI and open ideation platforms (e.g., a forum that allows the public to submit ideas for research, information on a specified problem, targets for intervention, or solutions to specified problems) are methods for obtaining information and feedback from a target group or the broader public about an idea or potential activity.

How can this approach enable co-creation?

Both an RFI and open ideation platform can be structured to allow and encourage submitters to respond to each other's submissions, provide critique and revisions, and potentially join forces to submit new joint responses. While USAID is typically a less active participant in the co-creative elements of these approaches due to procurement regulations, they can be a useful forum for engaging a range of external stakeholders to collaborate with each other around a specific problem or set of questions and mobilize attention and interest that can be leveraged by other complementary approaches. In the case of an RFI, there is also a bidirectional aspect of engagement between USAID and responders, as USAID asks specific questions, receives responses, and then publishes or in some cases, counters a response to the feedback. However, this method unfolds in a less fluid and equal manner than with other approaches. In contrast, USAID typically uses an open ideation platform to set broad questions or categories of desired input, and then allows the public to post their ideas or solutions, as well as comment on or rate others' responses.

VI. Public International Organization (PIO) Awards and Grants with Bilateral Donors

A PIO is an international organization composed principally of countries, or any other organization that the Office of General Counsel (GC) or the Bureau for Food Security (BFS) for international agricultural research centers, designates as a PIO. USAID provides funding to PIOs under different types of arrangements, including cost-type contributions, project contributions and general contributions.

Multi-donor trust funds are mechanisms where pooled funding from multiple donors may be used to support the host country's priorities. Multi-donor trust funds are most frequently structured where funding is administered by a PIO or another development partner. USAID contributions to a multi-donor trust fund usually manifest themselves as "program" or "project" contributions under ADS 308 (Awards to Public International Organizations).

Co-creation may also be pursued as a tactic to collaborate and co-design with other bilateral donor agencies that have development objectives in a partner country that align with USAID's efforts. See ADS 351: Grants with Bilateral Donors for more information.

How can this approach enable co-creation?

Per ADS 308.3.3, competition is not required for grants with PIOs. Since there are not competition concerns, activity design teams have an extremely wide spectrum of options in how to structure co-creation when designing a PIO grant. USAID and the PIO (or in the case of a multi-donor trust fund- the group of donors) can agree on steps to develop the grant such as rounds of multi-stakeholder consultations, co-creation of the program description, or co-creation of the monitoring and evaluation strategy. As long as USAID and the PIO or donor agree on the approach and develop trust, there are many opportunities for co-creation.

Where to go for more resources:

- ADS 308
- ADS 351

VII. Request for Application (RFA)/Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)

In accordance with ADS 303.3.5.2, Notice of Funding Opportunity, a NOFO/RFA is an announcement for a specific funding opportunity used when the intent is to provide assistance for an activity or methodology that supports or is in keeping with USAID's program objectives. When used, USAID should not publish a NOFO/RFA for less than 30 days unless there are exigent circumstances supported by a written determination by the AO.

How can this approach enable co-creation?

ADS 303.3.6.1.d, Eligibility Requirements, Multi-tiered Review, enables an activity design team to use a staged approach to select an applicant. Co-creation can be incorporated into the selection process where USAID and the apparently successful applicant (ASA) co-create the final program description for an activity. Co-creation can also be incorporated into the selection process where multiple applicants are brought together to co-create an activity or activities. In both cases, clear planning and instructions in the RFA are essential for applicant understanding and fairness.

Where to go for more resources:

- USAID Procurement Executive Bulletin No. 2015-01, Assistance Streaming Procedures

What does co-creation mean for Implementation?

The co-creation process rarely ends in the design phase, and often involves shared action and implementation. Engaging in this manner sets up more fluid and equal relationships, allowing more transparent and iterative implementation. And when there is shared ownership, it is more likely that all partners will feel committed to delivering results rather than following through for accountability's sake. Some areas to consider and include as appropriate in a solicitation and the resulting award or agreement to enhance learning and adaptive management during the implementation of a co-created activity include:

- **Ownership of outcomes and shared responsibility:** Because co-creation implies a joint ownership of outcomes, co-creation partners should consider during design how they will review progress together and make course corrections if needed (sets a good foundation for collaborative adaptive management). By embracing joint ownership and shared responsibility during implementation, USAID and co-creation partners should think through how to foster an environment where they accept failure and turn it into a learning process rather than a blaming event.

- **Develop a joint monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) Plan:** Collaboration that begins through a co-creation process should not end with the award of the activity. By involving key co-creation partners in the development of a joint learning agenda, the learning process during implementation can create greater buy-in from a wider range of stakeholders and serve to disseminate learning more widely. See the section below for additional MEL considerations for more information on developing Activity MEL Plans.

- **Budget implications:** If the design team would like to continue to engage with key stakeholders during implementation, there are budget implications. Design teams should build the necessary resources and funding for continued engagement with co-creation partners into the solicitation or activity budget.

- **Consider co-creation around annual work plans:** If appropriate, teams may consider using the annual work planning process to continue to foster input and collaboration during activity implementation. Involving co-creation partners or stakeholders in parts of the annual work plan development would continue to solicit their valuable input and feedback and ensure their continued ownership and buy-in of the activity.

- **Implementing partners can be the drivers for continued collaboration:** It is important to note that empowering implementing partners to continue to engage key co-creation stakeholders during implementation is critical to the success of an activity. While USAID may have been the convening power for an initial co-creation process, implementing partners should be empowered to continue that engagement forward during implementation as appropriate.

Co-Creation Implications for Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning?

The different modalities mentioned above culminate with a set of mutually agreed objectives and results that all parties carry into implementation. However, as discussed above, during a co-creation process many perspectives, contexts, and interests have been considered. What is the role of those partners in the monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) processes for the resulting activity?

The co-creation process sets the stage for a mutual understanding on the outcomes and evaluates the resources and expertise of all parties to achieve those outcomes. It is important that during the co-creation process, all parties agree not only on the outcomes desired, but also discuss the expectations and likelihood of achieving those outcomes and prepare for their evaluation. The shared

responsibility of the outcomes also requires a joint effort in the co-design of how they will be monitored, evaluated, and how learning will be shared.

USAID and its co-creation partners should consider the following MEL issues while engaged in a co-creation process:

- Discuss possible evaluation questions and methods that will be used to evaluate the activity results and outcomes;

- Discuss monitoring approaches and possible indicators and data collection processes for ongoing monitoring to answer identified evaluation questions;

- Clarify expectations and different requirements of partners when planning joint monitoring and evaluation activities; and

- Ensure all parties support the transparency of the monitoring and evaluation process and show an openness to learn from the evaluation findings.

Agency MEL requirements should be considered in making these determinations. Please refer to ADS 201.3.5.10 – 18, ADS 201mab, USAID Evaluation Statement of Work Requirements and USAID's Evaluation Toolkit for helpful guidance on planning and using evaluations.

Conclusion

Integrating co-creation processes into USAID activity design provides increased opportunities for USAID staff to understand the root causes of the problem, grasp the intricacies of complex local systems, network with a broad array of local stakeholders and experts as well as traditional partners, and work with multiple stakeholders to design an innovative solution and action plan to tackle a development challenge. As this discussion note describes, there is a wide spectrum of mechanisms available to USAID staff that enable co-creation.

As USAID embarks on continuing to study local systems and use participatory methods to design its activities, this note also raises the important question of how the spirit and intent of co-creation should evolve beyond the design stage to become part of how USAID implements, monitors, evaluates and learns from its development programming.