

USAID Co-Creation for Higher Education Institutions



WHAT IS CO-CREATION?

Co-creation is a process through which USAID brings together organizations and individuals to find sustainable solutions to development challenges. This approach allows USAID and other partners to capitalize on shared knowledge and experiences to distill strong ideas, build needed partnerships, and produce great outcomes. Co-creation deepens the potential for local ownership and provides the space for partners to integrate local context and understanding early into program design and planning. Co-creation can also be used during the design and creation (procurement) of new awards.

WHY SHOULD HEIs PARTICIPATE IN CO-CREATION?

Co-creation brings diverse perspectives together and encourages participants to develop innovative, non-traditional approaches to specific development objectives. Partners, potential implementers, and end-users define a problem collaboratively, understand challenges, discover fundamental questions, identify new and existing solutions, build consensus around action, and refine plans to move forward with programs and projects. For higher education institutions (HEIs), benefits of participation include:

- **Increased interaction with USAID.** Co-creation is a unique opportunity to learn more about USAID priorities, strategies, challenges, along with the program design and development processes.
- **Opportunities to find new partners and build relationships.** Co-creation often involves a wide array of USAID's partners including government leaders, practitioners, local and international NGOs, other technical experts, and even other HEI partners.
- **Improved understanding of development challenges.** Co-creation inherently builds in a strong learning process for all participants, so they can develop a collective understanding of the system in which a development challenge exists.
- **Greater clarity about USAID processes.** Participating in co-creation can help you learn more about the application process and how USAID evaluates funding applicants. In some new award processes, the successfully completing co-creation is *required* to submit a full application to a funding opportunity.

Finally, co-creation is here to stay. Co-creation is built into the USAID Program Cycle and Acquisition and Assistance Strategy, and it will be a key element of our work going forward. While it is expected to evolve over time, the core tenets of collaborative and open engagement are fundamental to all of USAID's operations.

Feedback from participants: “When done correctly, **co-creation produces a better project design and builds a better relationship between USAID and the implementing partner.** I have come to value co-creation for its ability to build a stronger relationship with the USAID staff on the receiving end of our emails. With a strong relationship, WE can better help our beneficiaries.”

WHY DOES USAID USE CO-CREATION?

Co-creation is a valuable tool in helping USAID find sustainable and innovative solutions to development challenges, and is specifically called out in the USAID 2019 Acquisition and Assistance Strategy. USAID values co-creation as it can increase return on investment, bring together a breadth of perspectives that can challenge assumptions, and create shared ownership of programs. Ultimately, co-creation helps infuse development approaches, goals, language, and ideas into interdisciplinary teams, improving a project’s impact for stronger, more sustainable development outcomes.

Feedback from participants: “**The co-creation process provided a unique opportunity to develop a proposal that was incredibly robust, informed by diverse voices, cognizant of opportunities and challenges, aligned with USAID principles, and driven by sustainable, measurable objectives.** It required significant time on the part of USAID and the institutions, but it made for a stronger proposal and ultimately (what we anticipate), more successful initiatives and productive partnerships.”

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING A CO-CREATION PROCESS

Co-creation is a term that can mean many things. Sometimes co-creation activities are held in-person over the course of an afternoon or a couple of days. Other times, they can be done virtually spanning days to weeks of continued engagement and communications. If you are invited to participate in a co-creation activity, ask the organizers to explain their expectations for your participation.

Feedback from participants: “**The co-creation process did not stop when our contract was signed,** because a member of the USAID co-creation team became our activity manager. **The good will, understanding, and trust developed via the co-creation carried into our implementation.** Our project started with an activity manager that truly understood our project and our team, and my team understood our activity manager and knew she had the best interest of our project in mind. The relationship has delivered amazing dividends as we faced implementation during COVID.”