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GOOD PRACTICES FOR SCHOLARSHIPS EMBEDDED IN LARGER USAID ACTIVITIES

GOOD PRACTICE BRIEF



Higher Education Scholarship Toolkit

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I. INTRODUCTION

USAID is focused on achieving locally sustained results and strengthening local capacities in order to assist partner countries with sustainable development. Higher education scholarships are tools that build the general capacity of a country's leaders across fields and roles. Higher education scholarships also build technical skills in specific sectors such as agriculture, health, economic growth, education, peace and security, and democracy, human rights, and governance. These strategies lead to two distinct types of USAID scholarships:

1. **Embedded scholarships** are those where the scholarship intervention is one of several components of an activity. Embedded scholarships are often part of sector-specific programming such as agriculture, public health, or larger education activities.
2. **Stand-alone scholarships** are activities where the scholarship programming is the main component of an activity, often aiming to build capacity across a single or multiple sectors.

Structure

This good practices brief is focused on good practices for embedded scholarships. It includes a summary of systems thinking and eight good practices to strengthen embedded scholarships within larger activities. To illuminate the good practices, examples of five embedded scholarship activities are summarized.

Methodology

This brief is based on a review of USAID scholarship activities and interviews with USAID staff and implementing partners.

Note on Using this Brief

This brief accompanies other resources in the USAID Higher Education Scholarships Toolkit. If you are new to scholarship programming, please consider reviewing *Seven Important Questions to Ask When Designing a USAID Scholarship Activity*,¹ which will provide an overview of questions your Operating Unit may want to ask as you consider scholarship programming.

¹ Campbell, Anne, and Ilham Chelabi. *Seven important questions to ask when designing a USAID scholarship activity*. United States Agency for International Development (USAID), 2021.

2. BACKGROUND: OPPORTUNITIES FOR SYNERGY AND GREATER IMPACT

Higher education scholarships are one tool in the toolbox of the large network of USAID actors and activities in order to achieve development objectives. Within this network, there are multiple opportunities for scholarship students to connect, learn, and partner—both during the activity and once they become alumni. Likewise, other USAID networks—such as Mission staff across OUs, implementing partners, and activity beneficiaries—can also help to enrich scholarship students’ academic and professional learning. In addition, these networks exist within national and local systems, which provide important context to understanding development outcomes.² Connecting scholarship students and alumni to larger USAID networks leads to real, sustained changes to achieve activity goals.

However, these opportunities to leverage embedded higher education scholarship interventions as a tool to achieve development objectives within an activity are not always identified, acted upon, and sustained. This brief intends to highlight how embedded scholarships are, and can be, connected to larger objectives and programming within USAID Missions and OUs. Alumni of embedded scholarship activities can have a lasting impact on countries and make significant contributions to development goals long after the scholarship intervention ends. A long-standing U.S. university administrator who worked on several USAID higher education and scholarship activities and advocates for scholarships embedded within larger initiatives, said:

I truly believe that scholarships are USAID’s best shot of having lasting impact. I mean, I am a strong advocate for the fact that you have to be doing capacity building within the organizations in the country alongside whatever you’re doing with the human capacity building [through scholarships]. I think that it’s really important that USAID continue to support this in that they see it as a value-added proposition to the work that they’re trying to do in the goals that they’re trying to accomplish.

Systems Thinking Connects Scholarships to Local Systems and Networks

Networks and local systems are powerful components of successful scholarships. Networks are informal and trusted connections that spread new ideas, share news, and sustain the fabric of society. Local systems are interconnected sets of actors who have a role in producing a particular development outcome.³ Scholarships programming, whether stand-alone or embedded, benefits from and contributes to both local systems and networks. They are also very well suited to expand on both—scholarship programming builds networks of students and future leaders, both within and across countries, as well as links their own networks.⁴ Through rigorous study and extracurricular programs, these students form trust and friendship with other students, host higher education institutions, and activity and program staff, among others.

2 USAID. “Local Systems: A Framework for Supporting Sustained Development.” (2014).

<https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1870/LocalSystemsFramework.pdf>

3 USAID. “Local Systems: A Framework for Supporting Sustained Development.” (2014).

<https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1870/LocalSystemsFramework.pdf>

4 Dassin, Joan R., Robin R. Marsh, and Matt Mawer, eds. International scholarships in higher education: Pathways to social change. Springer, 2017.

When thinking about ways to connect scholarships to larger objectives, use systems thinking. Systems thinking is an approach where single projects or activities are considered within a larger context of interdependent and interrelated systems, such as networks, policies, conditions, and constraints. Systems thinking also explores future opportunities by thinking about existing networks. For more information on USAID's approach to systems thinking, see [Local Systems: A Framework for Supporting Sustained Development](#).⁵

Examples of systems thinking at work in embedded scholarship programs include:

- Scholarships embedded in larger initiatives will often open scholarships to individuals who are already holding positions in the technical sector, such as government employees or faculty. These participants may take leaves of absence to pursue their education. One reason to consider limiting scholarships to these individuals is that they have established networks through which to share their learning during and after the scholarship.
- Some scholarship students might be very influential within networks, yet they do not have the academic qualifications needed to enroll in a higher degree. Without a higher degree, they may not be able to advance to a higher leadership position. In these cases, providing high quality pre-academic training, language skills, or writing assistance can remove barriers to the scholarship (e.g., English language test score) and therefore bridge the gap for the student to succeed in an academic program.
- By introducing scholarship students to professionals, students can learn about the field from experts and grow their professional networks. Established professionals can also learn from these well-educated young professionals, especially in terms of new technologies and research. Ties are made across generations. In turn, these connections extend the network to include scholarship students in the larger activity.
- To be more successful in terms of aligning scholarship students' credentials with employment opportunities, systems thinking can be applied to better understand the current and future employment landscape of the country. This includes thinking about industry and sector trends, social and cultural norms (especially for women and marginalized populations), workplace culture, salary in different positions, and perceptions of corruption and autonomy in the workplace.⁶

⁵ USAID. "Local Systems: A Framework for Supporting Sustained Development." (2014). <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1870/LocalSystemsFramework.pdf>

⁶ Tung, Rosalie L., and Mila Lazarova. "Brain drain versus brain gain: An exploratory study of ex-host country nationals in Central and East Europe." *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 17, no. 11 (2006): 1853-1872.

KEY POINT: CHALLENGES OF SMALL EMBEDDED SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMMING



Some scholarships can be quite small, with fewer than 10 students a year. Small scholarship interventions embedded within larger activities result in some additional challenges, such as a heavy administrative load for a few beneficiaries, less scholarship programming, fewer alumni events, and smaller networks to build from. In addition, fewer scholarships means greater expectation on scholarship students to enact change. Research shows that it is difficult for individuals to create systemic change without the support of others and engagement at multiple levels.⁷ When planning a scholarship embedded in a larger activity, consider funding more scholarships and designing the scholarship activity around cohorts of students to see a greater return on that investment—not just in funding more individuals but in the synergy and networks that a larger number of scholarships produces.

It may be helpful for an OU considering embedded scholarships to use the planning checklist in the Seven Important Questions to Ask When Designing a USAID Scholarship Activity⁸ resource in this Toolkit. You may determine that a small number of students is not sufficient to reach intended objectives. In this case, you may want to consider partnering with other technical areas in your OU to design a co-funded stand-alone scholarship activity. An example of this approach can be found in a case study on USAID/Indonesia's Program to Extend Scholarships and Training to Achieve Sustainable Impacts (PRESTASI).⁹

⁷ Bunker, Barbara Benedict, and Billie T. Alban. *The handbook of large group methods: Creating systemic change in organizations and communities*. John Wiley & Sons, 2012.

⁸ Campbell, Anne, and Ilham Chelabi. *Seven important questions to ask when designing a USAID scholarship activity*. United States Agency for International Development (USAID), 2021.

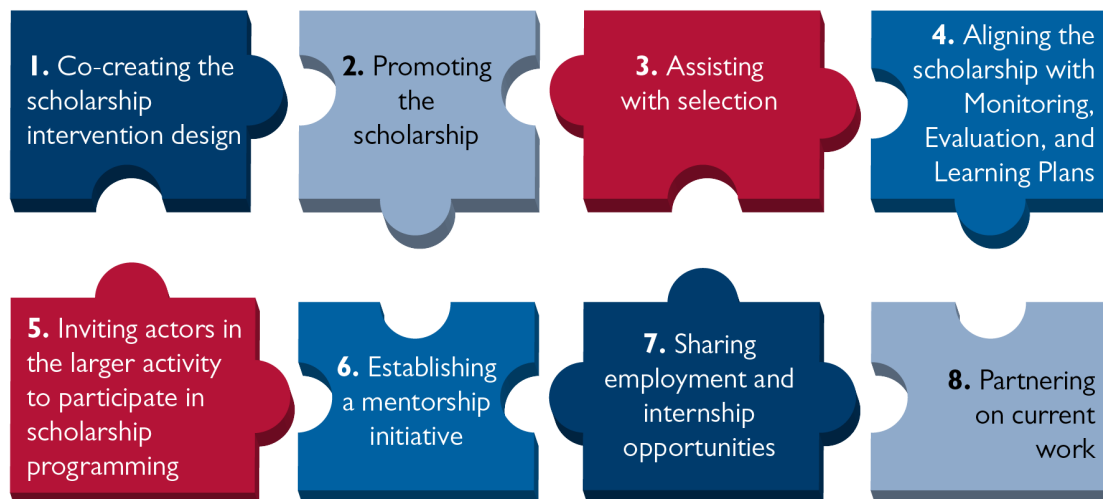
⁹ Chelabi, Ilham, and Anne Campbell. *USAID/Indonesia's Program to Extend Scholarships and Training to Achieve Sustainable Impacts (PRESTASI): Case Study*. United States Agency for International Development (USAID), 2021.

3. GOOD PRACTICES FOR EMBEDDED SCHOLARSHIP INTERVENTIONS

For higher education scholarships that are embedded as one of many interventions within an activity, there are multiple and unique opportunities for synergy. An activity’s quality, scope, or impact can be enhanced by thinking strategically about how scholarship interventions fit with other interventions, and how other aspects of the larger activity can improve the scholarship or alumni experience for the student.

The list below includes eight good practices for the managers and implementing partners of embedded scholarship interventions and for managers and implementing partners of the larger activity to engage with the scholarship intervention. A one-page graphic of these practices is available in Figure 1 and as a downloadable handout in Annex A.

FIGURE 1. Good Practices for Embedded Scholarship Interventions



Good Practice 1: Co-Creating the Scholarship Intervention Design

Engage individuals within the larger activity to help provide input into the scholarship intervention design. Input from various perspectives and levels will help to improve activity design and management later, and may also identify funding for additional scholarships. This is especially recommended if another donor or partner is co-funding the scholarship or if government employees are scholars.

Good Practice 2: Promoting the Scholarship

Ask individuals within the larger activity to help advertise the scholarship opportunity. These actors likely have extensive networks and can help recruit quality and diverse candidates. Some scholarship implementing partners have made physical copies of the application form to deliver to key stakeholders, asking them to hand out the application to those who might be eligible.

Good Practice 3: Assisting with Selection

Professionals within the sector can assist in reading applications or joining interview panels. Their perspectives and professional experiences in the field can provide a different and complementary perspective to USAID staff, higher education faculty and administrators, and alumni perspectives. Actors who also represent marginalized populations in the field can send a signal of inclusion and diversity, serving as an inspiration for the applicants.

Good Practice 4: Aligning the Scholarship with Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plans

Be familiar with the larger activity's monitoring, evaluation, and learning plan, the Country Development Cooperation Strategy, and other relevant Mission- or activity-level strategies or plans. Be clear to identify and collect the data that aligns with these larger objectives. You may also wish to collect additional data relevant to the scholarship, using component-level indicators. For additional guidance, see the *Guidance for Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) for Scholarship Activities*¹⁰ product of the Higher Education Scholarship Toolkit.

Good Practice 5: Inviting Actors in the Larger Activity to Participate in Scholarship Programming

In each activity, there are many stakeholders: USAID and implementing partner staff, partner organizations, advisors, and other beneficiaries. These individuals in the larger activity might serve as excellent speakers at scholarship orientation, conferences, or alumni events. When events happen, consider inviting them to meet with the scholarship students and alumni, leading to expanded networks.

Good Practice 6: Establishing a Mentorship Initiative

Participants in other Mission or OU projects and activities may make excellent mentors for the scholarship students and alumni. They can provide advice on the field, insight into new research and practice, make further connections for the student, and share opportunities that might be of interest. Some scholarship programming matches a mentor with a student at the very early stages of the scholarship, so the mentor provides advice during the student's study, job search, and early stages of their career (for young scholars).

“When designing a scholarship, get as many perspectives as possible. The key stakeholders should be involved. There are certain perspectives that we're not privy to, especially with certain partner country governments and their relationship with the U.S. Government. It's important to discuss these early on as they come up in management, and it's important to manage that diplomatic relationship, especially if government employees are scholars.”

USAID Scholarships Implementing Partner

¹⁰ Campbell, Anne and Ilham Chelabi. *Guidance for Monitoring, Evaluating, and Learning (MEL) for Scholarship Activities*. United States Agency for International Development (USAID), 2021.

Good Practice 7: Sharing Employment and Internship Opportunities

Current professionals can share employment or internship opportunities with scholarship students and alumni. If organizations are growing because of the USAID activity, consider employing alumni of USAID or other USG scholarships. Organizations may also provide summer internships or training programs to current scholarship students.

Good Practice 8: Partnering on Current Work

Organizations often benefit from perspectives not currently in their network: youth voices, graduate students, or individuals working in new industries. Actors in the larger activity can invite alumni to events, seek their expertise, or ask them to advise or join boards. If the budget allows, paying alumni for their assistance is recommended.

4. EXAMPLES OF EMBEDDED SCHOLARSHIPS ACROSS SECTORS

The following provides an overview of five USAID scholarship interventions that are embedded in larger activities to reach development goals and objectives.

Agriculture and Food Security

Scholarships have been a long-standing tool to reach agriculture and food security objectives. Activities advance content expertise, develop research and evaluation skills, and build leadership and networks for research and activities. In addition to focusing on technical skills development, scholarships are often targeted at women, with an understanding that women play a vital role in advancing agricultural development and food security in many countries.¹¹

Feed the Future

Feed the Future, the U.S. government's global hunger and food security initiative addresses the root causes of poverty, hunger, and malnutrition. To achieve this, Feed the Future activities work with partner countries to develop their agriculture sectors. A central component to Feed the Future is creating important opportunities for women and young people, including providing scholarships for graduate education.

Within the larger Feed the Future portfolio, the network of Feed the Future Innovation Labs provide graduate degree training to students in Africa, Asia, the United States, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Led by U.S. universities, the Innovation Labs work closely with higher education institutions in the partner countries on research activities and support students from the United States and partner countries in pursuit of agricultural research and advanced degrees. In 2017, 811 students (42 percent female) received graduate education and training through the Innovation Labs; of these, 190 students from partner countries studied in the United States at 37 U.S. universities.

Economic Growth and Trade

Scholarships that promote economic growth and trade often focus on training individuals in new industries in a country (e.g., ecotourism) or in fields that could improve economic development and trade (e.g., supply chain management). These initiatives are often targeted at developing a cohort with these skills, so a trained workforce is available to launch and sustain these new industries. In addition, scholarships in economic growth and trade often partner with other initiatives that are growing these businesses and related sectors for sustainable activities and long-term gains.

¹¹ USAID, "Achieving Gender Equality in Agriculture," 2021, <https://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment/addressing-gender-programming/agriculture>

¹² Feed the Future, "Feed the Future: The U.S. Government's Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative," 2021, <https://www.feedthefuture.gov/>

¹³ Feed the Future, "Feed the Future Innovation Labs." 2021, <https://www.feedthefuture.gov/feed-the-future-innovation-labs/>

¹⁴ USAID. "Title XII FY 2017 Report to Congress" (2017). <https://www.usaid.gov/documents/1867/title-xii-fy-2017-report-congress>

One Health Workforce and One Health Workforce Next Gen

One Health Workforce (OHW) worked to prevent, detect, and respond to the threat of infectious diseases globally. As part of USAID's Emerging Pandemic Threats 2 program, OHW worked with two regional university networks in Central and Eastern Africa and the Southeast Asia One Health University Network (SEAOHUN). OHW was able to leverage these established university networks to create a sustainable transformation in the regions' health workforces. OHW was implemented by the University of Minnesota and Tufts University.

Over the course of OHW, more than 60 scholarships (partial and full) were funded across the project countries in areas that align with the One Health Strategy. For example, SEAOHUN provided 30 scholarships for students from Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Myanmar to pursue One-Health related Master's programs. The logic is that the current and future public health workforce will use their multidisciplinary knowledge to advance local and national health developments in academia, government, and human- and animal-health organizations.²⁴ In addition, the large group of scholarship students provides an impetus for institutional reforms and new academic programs at host universities. As part of the follow-on activity, OHW - Next Generation, implemented by a consortium led by University of California, Davis, also supports Master's degree scholarships. In the first year of the follow-on activity, 20 Master's scholarships were awarded at Kinshasa School of Public Health in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and six were awarded through the SEAOHUN to students in Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, and Vietnam.²⁵

²⁴ SEAOHUN, "SEAOHUN Scholarship Program," 2021, <https://www.seaohun.org/scholarship>

²⁵ One Health Workforce-Next Generation Consortium. "2020 Annual Report." One Health Institute, University of California, Davis. (2020). https://ohi.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/sites/g/files/dgvnsk5251/files/inline-files/OHW-NG%20AR%20Year%201%20-%20FINAL_2.pdf

5. CONCLUSION

For scholarships that are embedded as part of larger activities, there are unique opportunities and challenges that may not always be present with stand-alone scholarship programming. By using systems thinking, scholarships embedded in larger activities can be linked strategically to the overall objectives of the activity, enhancing the activity's quality, scope, MEL activities, and impact. In addition, the larger activity can enrich the planning, administration, and outcomes of the scholarship intervention. Thinking systematically about how scholarships can fit with other activities across the Mission can improve both mutual development objectives and the scholarship itself.

6. ANNEX A: 8 GOOD PRACTICES FOR SCHOLARSHIPS EMBEDDED IN LARGER USAID ACTIVITIES

1. Co-creating the scholarship intervention design

Engage individuals within the larger activity to help provide input into the scholarship intervention design. Input from various perspectives and levels will help to improve activity design and management later, and may also identify funding for additional scholarships. This is especially recommended if another donor or partner is co-funding the scholarship or if government employees are scholars.

2. Promoting the scholarship

Ask individuals within the larger activity to help advertise the scholarship opportunity. These actors likely have extensive networks and can help recruit quality and diverse candidates. Some scholarship implementing partners have made physical copies of the application form to deliver to key stakeholders, asking them to hand out the application to those who might be eligible.

3. Assisting with selection

Professionals within the sector can assist in reading applications or joining interview panels. Their perspectives and professional experiences in the field can provide a different and complementary perspective to USAID staff, higher education faculty and administrators, and alumni perspectives. Actors who also represent marginalized populations in the field can send a signal of inclusion and diversity, serving as an inspiration for the applicants.

4. Aligning the scholarship with Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plans

Be familiar with the larger activity's monitoring, evaluation, and learning plan, the Country Development Cooperation Strategy, and other relevant Mission- or activity-level strategies or plans. Be clear to identify and collect the data that aligns with these larger objectives. You may also wish to collect additional data relevant to the scholarship, using component-level indicators. For additional guidance, see the Guidance for Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) for Scholarship Activities I3 product of the Higher Education Scholarship Toolkit.

5. Inviting actors in the larger activity to participate in scholarship programming

In each activity, there are many stakeholders: USAID and implementing partner staff, partner organizations, advisors, and other beneficiaries. These individuals in the larger activity might serve as excellent speakers at scholarship orientation, conferences, or alumni events. When events happen, consider inviting them to meet with the scholarship students and alumni, leading to expanded networks.

6. Establishing a mentorship initiative

Participants in other Mission or OU projects and activities may make excellent mentors for the scholarship students and alumni. They can provide advice on the field, insight into new research and practice, make further connections for the student, and share opportunities that might be of interest. Some scholarship programming matches a mentor with a student at the very early stages of the scholarship, so the mentor provides advice during the student's study, job search, and early stages of their career (for young scholars).

7. Sharing employment and internship opportunities

Current professionals can share employment or internship opportunities with scholarship students and alumni. If organizations are growing because of the USAID activity, consider employing alumni of USAID or other USG scholarships. Organizations may also provide summer internships or training programs to current scholarship students.

8. Partnering on current work

Organizations often benefit from perspectives not currently in their network: youth voices, graduate students, or individuals working in new industries. Actors in the larger activity can invite alumni to events, seek their expertise, or ask them to advise or join boards. If the budget allows, paying alumni for their assistance is recommended.