



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

# Customer Service Plan

10/26/11

## Executive Summary

The United States has a long history of extending a helping hand to those people overseas struggling to make a better life, recover from a disaster or striving to live in a free and democratic country. It is this caring that stands as a hallmark of the United States around the world -- and shows the world our true character as a nation. This customer service plan, issued in accordance with Executive Order 13571 *Streamlining Service Delivery and Improving Customer Service*, addresses issues intended to help ensure that the Agency's programs and priorities are as responsive as possible to customer needs. USAID seeks to identify who its customers are and to secure their participation in order to better target its project approaches and to focus its efforts and resources on the most productive tasks.

As a development agency with a diverse staff and customer base, USAID must consider the principles that determine how it performs its work around the world. The following guiding principles are best practices, learned over time, that have proved instrumental to achieving development results. These principles are:

- Managing for Results
- Maintaining a Customer Focus
- Building Teamwork and Participation
- Encouraging Empowerment and Accountability
- Valuing Diversity

USAID policy defines 'customer' as the person or group who is receiving a service, or who is considered the recipient or beneficiary of a given result or output. There are several different types of USAID customers:

- **Ultimate customers:** Those host country individuals, especially the socially- and economically-disadvantaged, who are beneficiaries of USAID assistance and whose participation is essential to achieving sustainable development results.
- **Intermediate customers:** Those organizations, including host country governments that receive USAID services to implement programs that are designed to benefit the ultimate customer. This includes private voluntary organizations (PVOs), private sector contractors, and host country entities.
- **Internal/process customer:** Bureaus, Offices, Operating Units, and individuals within USAID that benefit from and participate in the activities undertaken by other Bureaus, Offices, Operating Units, and individuals within the Agency.
- **Washington and U.S.-based customers:** U.S. Government entities, or individuals representing such an entity, at whose behest USAID carries out its programs and who have a stake in the program results that USAID produces. Examples include Congress, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and the Department of State. Congress represents U.S. taxpayers.

USAID best practices in working with customers include:

- Exercising participatory planning techniques to obtain direct involvement of customers and to identify their aspirations and priorities;
- Consulting with organizations that represent the interests of customers;
- Monitoring customer participation and consistently seeking feedback through surveys, field visits, and open forums to determine if USAID's efforts are consistent with the aspirations or needs of its customers;
- Using customer information to frame program strategies and to design specific interventions; and

- Communicating with customers on how their recommendations have been incorporated into programs and the results achieved.

The majority of USAID's customers are not the 'traditional' U.S.-based public. However, consistent with the intent of Executive Order 13571, USAID's customer service plan highlights both the efforts the agency is undertaking to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of aid delivery as well as our interactions with the U.S. public on whose behalf the agency provides humanitarian and development assistance.

Given our diverse customer base, USAID has chosen to highlight a signature initiative that focuses on improving information for our core business and two additional services that focus on efficient internal customer processes and reaching the U.S. public with information about USAID's work.

<b>SIGNATURE INITIATIVE: PROGRAMMING RESOURCES TOOLBOX</b>
<p><b>Overview:</b> USAID and its partners have created a wealth of resources to guide programming activities worldwide. Despite the invaluable information they contain, these resources are not readily accessible in a central location for the purposes of empowering USAID customers and the international development community to improve development activities. The USAID Programming Resources Toolbox will remedy this problem by making USAID’s programming resources available to a wide variety of customers in a single, easily navigable and accessible website.</p> <p><b>Key Customer Groups:</b> Agency staff; other USG staff; General Public</p> <p><b>Timing:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fall 2011: Develop graphical interface and architecture and pilot</li> <li>• Winter 2011: Develop documentation and training materials</li> <li>• Spring 2012: Make system available and provide user training</li> </ul>
<b>SERVICE 1: DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCE CLEARINGHOUSE (DEC)</b> <i>Office of Chief Information Officer (CIO)/ Knowledge Services Center (KSC)</i>
<p><b>Overview:</b> The objective of the DEC is to further the goals of U.S. foreign policy by providing information about USAID’s international development programs, so current and future projects can benefit from knowledge about past projects.</p> <p><b>Key Customer Groups:</b> General Public; Agency staff</p> <p><b>Challenges:</b> The Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC) provides a knowledge repository for USAID programs, however, the system is not optimized for knowledge sharing and transfer.</p> <p><b>Featured Actions:</b> Rollout of DEC 2.0</p>
<b>SERVICE 2: INCREASE PUBLIC INFORMATION THROUGH WEB-BASED AND SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT</b> <i>Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs (LPA)</i>
<p><b>Overview:</b> USAID is in the process of creating formal guidelines for Agency use of Social Media. As a first step toward establishing these guidelines, USAID’s Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs has set up an intranet site for USAID staff which addresses key issues surrounding the use of social media such as content considerations, technical requirements, comments and privacy, and compliance with relevant OMB memoranda. A key deliverable in this effort has also been the <i>Development Outreach and Communications Survival Manual</i>, a guidance document for USAID staff seeking to engage various audiences through social media.</p> <p><b>Key Customer Groups:</b> General public; Agency staff</p> <p><b>Challenges:</b> Adopting new technologies brings risk as well as opportunity. While highlighting opportunities for Agency staff to use social media, USAID has also had to address inherent risks including the use of third party software, privacy issues, and guidelines for formal communications with USAID.</p> <p><b>Featured Actions:</b> Creation of formal guidelines for Agency use of Social Media; Agency-wide website redesign; Strategy for Digital Engagement</p>

## SIGNATURE INITIATIVE: PROGRAMMING RESOURCES TOOLBOX

**Overview:** USAID and its partners have created a wealth of resources to guide programming activities worldwide. Despite the invaluable information they contain, these resources are not readily accessible in a central location for the purposes of empowering others to improve development activities. The USAID Programming Resources Toolbox would remedy this problem by making USAID's programming resources available to a wide variety of audiences in a single, easily navigable and accessible website.

### *Overview*

The USAID Programming Resources Toolbox, which embraces the USAID Forward mandate for innovation, will put more than 200 of USAID's programming resources at users' fingertips within seconds. The resources will address the entire programming cycle from needs assessment to program planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, bringing together strategies, policies, standards, guidelines, databases, and websites, in a single, easy-to-navigate site. Each resource will be tagged according to its applicability across sectors and cross cutting themes. The Toolbox will empower users to locate the right resource quickly without extensive searching. Online capabilities will allow users to sort, search, rank, tag, discuss, and add new resources as USAID enriches its expertise as the world's premier development agency.

The Toolbox initiative employs a forward-thinking approach to technology. Rather than duplicating items which are resident in other databases, it pulls from them directly through an automated interface. For instance, the Toolbox consumes metadata from USAID's Development Experience Clearinghouse, automatically tagging and categorizing documents for easier search and retrieval by end users. The graphical interface is designed with a focus on ease-of-use, providing multiple views of the Toolbox to accommodate users who may be searching for a single item, or groupings of items focused on sectors, programming phases, or special initiatives. An on-line suggestion feature allows end users, whether from USAID or the general public, to propose other tools for inclusion in the Toolbox. These suggestions are then routed automatically to subject matter experts for further review and cataloging. Visualization engines resident within the Toolbox provide immediate, graphical representations of Toolbox content, allowing users to quickly grasp the overall content and organization without extensive use. Finally, the Toolbox also provides an automated web service, enabling its content to be directly shared with other web-based systems.

### *Impact and Benefits*

- **Delivery Acceleration:** While rich in content, USAID's technical guidance and programming tools are found in multiple locations ranging from centralized databases to bureau and mission websites to websites of implementing partners. Consolidating programming resources in a central database expedites search and retrieval and obviates the need for USAID staffers to expend valuable time culling multiple sites for critical information.
- **Public Transparency:** Many of the resources contained within the Toolbox had been previously housed on various USAID intranet sites. The Toolbox has intentionally moved these resources into the public domain in order to increase transparency and public awareness.
- **Cost Reduction:** The Toolbox initiative will lower costs associated with staff hours spent on search and retrieval for programming resources. Its integration with other systems via web services decreases

overall operations and maintenance costs associated with maintaining separate document management systems.

***Key Milestones and Timeline***

- Fall 2011: Develop graphical interface and architecture and pilot
- Winter 2011: Develop documentation and training materials
- Spring 2012: Make system available and provide user training

**SERVICE #1: DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCE CLEARINGHOUSE (DEC)**

*Office of Chief Information Officer (CIO)/ Knowledge Services Center (KSC)*

**Overview:** The objective of the DEC is to further the goals of U.S. foreign policy by providing information about USAID's international development programs, so current and future projects can benefit from knowledge about past projects.

**Key Customer Groups:** General Public; Agency staff

**Challenges:** The Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC) provides a knowledge repository for USAID programs, however, the system is not optimized for knowledge sharing and transfer.

**Featured Actions:** Rollout of DEC 2.0

**1. Increase Feedback from Customers**

- The DEC seeks to increase opportunities for users to offer feedback as well as identifying potential audiences who are not yet being served by existing communications efforts. This includes querying user communities to determine how best to improve service to them; collect and analyze feedback supplied by the DEC Express user community.
- User feedback on problems and inconsistencies in the information served on the DEC site is processed and remedied.
- The DEC is currently and continuously adding enhancements that have been requested by or are otherwise useful to users; this process is expected to be ongoing throughout calendar years 2011-2012.

**2. Adopt Best Practices for Improving Customer Experience**

- The DEC focuses on ensuring USAID-specific technical and programmatic materials are safely preserved, well organized, and easily accessible, while focusing on customers and their needs rather than on the technology itself.
- Transparency-in-government efforts fit naturally with the DEC's role as a publicly accessible repository of technical and programmatic USAID resources.
- DEC staff keep abreast of Web socialization innovations and user community wants and needs, and incorporate Web 2.0 features as appropriate. The DEC 2.0 will be a collaborative space allowing comments, ratings and tagging of documents as well as collaborative blogs.
- The DEC seeks to constantly improve the user experience by updating Help files and adding training videos as well as conducting training directed toward advanced users covering topics such as how to query specific tables and fields using quick search.
- With its focus on customer needs, the DEC staff regularly review user habits and associated rights to features on the system to balance security with usability.

**3. Set, Communicate, and Use Customer Service Metrics and Standards**

- The DEC actively tracks web site usage statistics and acts on statistics where trends point to better ways to serve identified user communities.
- DEC servers are continuously monitored to ensure optimum running efficiency.

**4. Streamline Agency Processes to Reduce Costs and Accelerate Delivery**

- **Increasing program effectiveness:** As the principal agency charged with offering foreign assistance, USAID has helped countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe, and the Middle East recover from disaster, escape from poverty, and expand democracy. The experience and information gleaned from these efforts represent a body of knowledge unique and invaluable to the agency, to its international partners, and to the public.
- The USAID Knowledge Services Center (KSC), which supports agency-wide knowledge access and exchange, ensures that this institutional memory is preserved, organized, and readily available through its Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC). With each document that is submitted and each user-friendly tool that is added, such as those enabling users to rate, tag, comment on, and share these documents, the DEC becomes increasingly useful to its users and to the promotion of transparency and lessons learned.
- **Increasing efficiency of search tools:** The Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC) contains thousands of USAID-funded resources documenting the Agency's half-century of foreign assistance. Additional metadata such as contract numbers, subject descriptors, and translated titles are being added to the records to help users search for and evaluate those documents that will be most useful to them. The goal is to develop and assign metadata that facilitates searching and enables users to find materials that are relevant to them. Further, the staff also continues to convert older materials to digital format while further enhancing the DEC collection by searching for new development-related resources. New tools for better searching and filtering will be rolled out in the DEC 2.0.

**SERVICE #2: INCREASE PUBLIC INFORMATION THROUGH WEB-BASED AND SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT**  
*Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs (LPA)*

**Overview:** USAID is in the process of creating formal guidelines for Agency use of Social Media. As a first step toward establishing these guidelines, USAID’s Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs has set up an intranet site for USAID staff which addresses key issues surrounding the use of social media such as content considerations, technical requirements, comments and privacy, and compliance with relevant OMB memoranda. A key deliverable in this effort has also been the *Development Outreach and Communications Survival Manual*, an internal guidance document for USAID staff seeking to engage various audiences through social media.

**Key Customer Groups:** General public; Agency staff

**Challenges:** Adopting new technologies brings risk as well as opportunity. While highlighting opportunities for Agency staff to use social media, USAID has also had to address inherent risks including the use of third party software, privacy issues, and guidelines for formal communications with USAID.

**1. Increase Feedback from Customers**

- The innovative idea behind social media is to create virtual feedback loops with diverse audiences. Accordingly, USAID’s *Development Outreach and Communications Survival Manual* encourages staff to use social media in such a way that participants are able to leave messages or to post comments. USAID’s approach to social media is intentionally challenging staff to look beyond one-way communication in favor of using Web 2.0 tools to encourage dialogue.
- Other customers for USAID’s social media efforts include USAID employees themselves. USAID’s Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs (LPA) has established an internal Google Site for “USAID Social Media” where staffers can gain more information on social media and share documents and best practices. LPA has also established a centralized email addressed focused exclusively on handling social media inquiries.

**2. Adopt Best Practices for Improving Customer Experience**

- **Best Practices by Technology Platform:** It is difficult to discuss best practices in social media without reference to specific technologies. USAID’s social media team has made several of the most common social media platforms accessible to USAID users. For each of these platforms – Facebook, Flickr, IdeaScale, LinkedIn, SlideShare, Twitter, and YouTube – the social media team has provided detailed descriptions of functionality along with best practices for garnering intended results.
- **Best Practices for Government:** USAID’s social media intranet site and its *Development Outreach and Communications Survival Manual* both address best practices for the use of social media within the government domain. These resources address issues such as privacy and security, the legal status of social media communications, technology endorsement, and compliance with Agency and OMB memoranda. These resources also provide links to sites of other USG agencies renowned for their effective use of social media.

**3. Set, Communicate, and Use Customer Service Metrics and Standards**

- Part of the attractiveness of social media and web-based communications is that they can be statistically measured to determine numbers, types, and locations of audiences being reached. Part of USAID’s social media strategy involves providing guidance to USAID users on how to use the measurement tools resident within each technology to better understand audience demographics.

Sample metrics highlighted for use include: country/city of residence, male/female ratio, age groups, and numbers joining/leaving site.

- For its internal customers at USAID, the social media team has noted that the introduction of social media to the Agency is being undertaken in a phased approach. The initial phase has focused on the creation of USAID's social media intranet site and the *Development Outreach and Communications Survival Manual*. The creation of formal guidelines for Agency use of social media is currently underway.

#### **4. Streamline Agency Processes to Reduce Costs and Accelerate Delivery**

- **Streamlining via Format:** One of the advantages to social media is the many different formats in which it is available. USAID's social media team has encouraged users to think creatively in terms of streamlining content delivery. In some cases, sharing videos or photos of events not only expedites delivery but decreases workload for USAID staff, thereby reducing costs. Encouraging the use of mobile-phone based formats has also helped USAID staff make productive use of time when away from computers and to expedite the delivery of breaking news.
- **Streamlining via Technique:** Unlike many traditional technologies, social media is intrinsically linked and networked. This often enables users to link accounts, or to take advantage of several technologies simultaneously while focusing only on one or two primary technologies. USAID's social media team has provided guidance on linking technologies and on using specialized tools and applications to communicate across multiple sites simultaneously. Employing these techniques not only reduces the cost and time requirements associated with learning but allows USAID staffers to reach much broader audiences more efficiently.