



## Post-Award Orientation Conferences



Feedback: [howtoworkwithusaid@usaid.gov](mailto:howtoworkwithusaid@usaid.gov)

- Welcome to our e-module on Post-Award Orientation Conferences in our series on “How to Work with USAID.”
- This module is provided to give you best practices and guidance on the post-award process, and specifically on preparing for a post-award orientation conference. We hope you find this information helpful, and we appreciate any feedback, which you may send to [howtoworkwithusaid@usaid.gov](mailto:howtoworkwithusaid@usaid.gov).

The objectives of this e-module are to better understand:

1. What will take place at a post-award orientation conference
2. The roles and responsibilities of USAID and implementing partner personnel in the post-award process
3. Tips for preparing for a successful post-award orientation conference

See other [e-modules](#) on programmatic or financial reports, as well as branding & marking.

2

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## 1. Outline of Post-Award Orientation Conference



3

Let's begin by explaining the post-award orientation conference, where you will be introduced to the USAID personnel that will oversee your project.



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## Post-Award Orientation Conference

- The goals of the conference are:
  1. Clarify procedures to facilitate award implementation
  2. Detail the more critical or complex requirements to ensure understanding
  3. Invite questions from the awardee on any requirement that still needs clarification
  4. Clarify roles of key personnel
  5. Identify and resolve potential issues

4

A post-award orientation conference generally has five main goals:

- (1) First, to clarify procedures to facilitate award implementation.
- (2) Secondly, to detail the more critical or complex requirements of the award and ensure understanding.
- (3) The third goal is to invite questions from the awardee regarding any requirements needing clarification.
- (4) Fourthly, to clarify the roles that key personnel will play in award implementation.
- (5) And lastly, to identify and resolve potential issues.



## Outline of Conference

- CO/AO or A&A Specialist leads the conference
- Terms of the Award – e.g. period of performance
- Financial aspects – e.g. letter of credit or advances; payment methods
- Technical project description and programmatic reports
- Standard provisions
- Common issues, for example:
  - Communication
  - Branding & Marking
  - Environmental Compliance
  - Value Added Tax (VAT)

5

Each post-award orientation conference may differ depending on the amount and type of award and the experience of your organization, so here we'll provide you a general outline of what to expect.

- Either the Contracting or Agreement Officer or Acquisition and Assistance Specialist will lead the post-award orientation conference.
- Much of the time will be spent going over the terms of the award, for example the period of performance.
- The conference also will cover financial aspects, for example whether your award entails a letter of credit and/or USAID personnel may explain procedures for advances as well as payment methods.
- Additionally, the conference will cover the technical project description as well as what programmatic reports are required.
- We'll also go over the standard provisions contained in your award with USAID.
- Lastly, the conference may cover common issues frequently encountered by partners in the country in which you will work, such as
  - how you will communicate with the AO/CO and A&A Specialists and/or AOR/COR.
  - We may discuss the branding and marking plan and how you will implement it

- We also may cover environmental requirements and what you will need to do to comply.
- as well as value added tax (VAT) and what steps you must take to ensure that your program is not taxed by the host country government or to report back when this occurs.
- We'll highlight these last two issues later in this e-module.

## 2. Roles & Responsibilities of USAID Personnel and Partners



6

Understanding the roles and responsibilities of USAID personnel and partners is important to make the most of a post-award orientation conference and manage your award. So in this section, we'll discuss who are the key USAID representatives and also which personnel from your staff that you should bring to the conference.



## Key USAID Representatives

USAID Personnel	Responsibility
<b>Agreement or Contracting Officer (AO/CO) A&amp;A Specialist</b>	Authority to enter into, administer, close-out, terminate, make determinations and findings on behalf of USAID.
<b>Agreement or Contracting Officer Representative (AOR/COR)</b>	Responsible for technical oversight, monitoring and invoice verification.
<b>Activity Manager</b> (for some awards)	The USAID representative who may be designated to serve as your day-to-day point of contact.
<b>Development Outreach Coordinator (DOC)</b>	Develops outreach strategy and public relations materials; branding and marking. See <a href="#">Branding &amp; Marking e-module</a> .
<b>Financial Management Officer or Financial Analyst</b>	Approves advances and liquidations. Process SF-270 and SF-425 (grants/cooperative agreements) and SF-1034 (contracts). See <a href="#">Financial Reporting e-module</a> .

7

An important part of the post-award orientation conference is to clarify the roles of the USAID personnel that will work most closely with your project. The table on this slide summarizes the responsibilities of the most relevant USAID personnel to the post-award process.

- For grants and cooperative agreements, the Agreement Officer (AO) and the Agreement Officer’s Representative (AOR) are very important. For contracts, the Contracting Officer (CO) and Contracting Officer’s Representative (COR) are important. The AO and CO have the authority to enter into, administer, close out, and terminate award agreements. They are also responsible for making determinations and findings on behalf of USAID. Also, Acquisition and Assistance Specialists (A&A Specialists) assist the AO/CO by reviewing and analyzing requests from partners to ensure that they comply with regulations and negotiate award conditions and modifications for AO/CO review and approval.
- The AOR and COR are responsible for providing technical oversight, monitoring, and invoice verification for USAID awards. An AO or CO may delegate authorities to an AOR or COR, which we’ll explain in a bit.
- Particularly for large awards that have many sub-parts or “field support mechanisms” that are centrally funded and managed from Washington DC, the Activity Manager is the USAID representative who may be designated to serve as your day-to-day point of contact. However, the AOR/CORs still are responsible for providing technical

oversight, monitoring, and invoice verification for USAID awards. Thus, make sure you understand each person's role and ask questions for more clarity if needed.

- The Development Outreach Coordinator (DOC) develops outreach strategy and public relations materials. He or she will be your primary point of contact in interacting with any media. The DOC also approves branding and marking plans.
- Lastly, the Financial Management Officer or Financial Analyst will describe procedures for approving advances and liquidations, as well as the process for completing SF-270 and SF-425 (for grants/cooperative agreements) and SF-1034 (for contracts). Each of these forms is fully explained in the e-module on Financial Reporting.



## Understanding Authorities

### Only an AO/CO has the authority to approve:

- Changes to any term or condition in the instrument such as:
  - Statements of work/program descriptions
  - Period of performance
  - Adjustment of requirements
- Change administrative items such as:
  - Accounting data
  - Administrative offices
  - Payment procedures
- Increase or realign budget to accomplish the program description / statement of work
- Allow the purchase of something additional
- Cause the partner to expend any effort, time, or money on anything not covered in the award
- **Without CO/AO approval, it is an unauthorized commitment or action and could result in non-payment.**



8

- Now, a note of caution for your organization: USAID evaluates and issues awards to implementing partners whose projects best fulfill a development need. Upon entering into an award with USAID, you commit to implementing the project as you designed it.
- The only personnel authorized to make changes to the award agreement are the Agreement Officer (for grants and cooperative agreements) or the Contracting Officer (for contracts). These changes to the award may include:
  - Any Term or Condition in the Instrument such as:
    - Statements of work or program descriptions,
    - Period of performance, or
    - Adjustment of requirements
  - Change Administrative Items such as:
    - Accounting data,
    - Administrative offices, or
    - Payment procedures.
  - Increase or realign budget to accomplish the program description or statement of work
  - Allow the purchase of something additional that is not already

allowed in the instrument, or

- Cause the partner to expend any effort, time or money on anything not covered in the instrument.
- Without AO/CO Approval, such changes could be considered unauthorized and result in non-payment for the goods and services provided under the award. For example, if you submit an invoice that is outside the period of performance of the award, it cannot be approved and reimbursed. This is why it's critical to read your award carefully and understand what requires AO/CO approval. Make sure to speak up when you have questions.



- Review the AOR/COR letter.
- Understand what the AOR/COR can and cannot do.
- For cooperative agreements, understand what constitutes “substantial involvement,” e.g.:
  - approval of which key personnel positions,
  - what approvals are needed for sub-awards and with what amount limitation, etc.
- Understand the differences between sub-contracts and awards

- Since you now understand how important the AO and CO are, make sure to review the AOR/COR designation letter carefully. Even if you have received funding before, each AOR/COR designation letter can vary depending on the award.
- Also, make sure you understand what the AOR/COR can and cannot do. If your project has an Activity Manager, also understand his or her role and how it relates to the AOR/COR and what the Activity Manager can and cannot do.
- For cooperative agreements, it is also important to understand what constitutes “substantial involvement,” for example:
  - approval of which key personnel positions,
  - what approvals are needed for sub-awards and with what amount limitation; for example, the award may specify that the AOR may approve sub-grants below \$100,000, but above that amount requires approval by the AO.
- Lastly, make sure you understand the differences between sub-contracts and sub-awards, and what approvals may be needed for each. It’s best to have this conversation during the post-award orientation conference so that everyone is clear.



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## Awardee Personnel – Who to Bring?

- Who should we bring?
  - Chief of Party
  - Any Key Personnel
  - Procurement and Finance
  - Monitoring & Evaluation Specialist



10

- Now that you understand and can identify the roles of USAID personnel, your organization will want to consider which personnel should attend the post-award orientation conference.
- The Chief of Party and all personnel you feel are key to the implementation of the project should attend, as well as those in charge of procurement, finance, and monitoring and evaluation. A successful post-award orientation conference should include all of these personnel to ensure maximum understanding of the award throughout your organization.

### 3. Tips for Preparing for a Post-Award Orientation Conference



11

Let's move on to some tips on how to prepare for a post-award orientation conference.



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## Preparing for a Post-Award Orientation Conference

- **Read the Award!**



- Including standard provisions
- Do not assume standard provisions same as a previous award.
- For cooperative agreements, understand what substantial involvement entails.
- Request a copy of the AOR/COR designation letter in advance.

12

- First and foremost, read the award inside and out! By that we mean read **all** the parts. Often partners focus on reading only the program description or looking at the budget, but it's *vital* important that you understand all the *terms* in the award, including the standard provisions and referenced policies. Standard provisions may cover things varying from what must be posted on the Development Exchange Clearinghouse (the DEC) to whether USAID funds must be in a separate interest-bearing account.
- Also if you have received USAID funding before, do not assume that the standard provisions are the same as a previous award, as they may differ each time. Likewise, policies may change or be updated. For example, in the past partners had to request approval of international travel, which is no longer required. Particularly if you previously received a fixed obligation grant (FOG) or fixed amount award (FAA), the provisions may be very different than what you are used to. Make sure you understand what those differences are and are fully aware of the provisions of your current award.
- For cooperative agreements, make sure you really understand what substantial involvement entails, for example which positions are key personnel that must be approved by the AOR.
- You also may request a copy of the AOR/COR designation letter in advance.



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## Preparing for a Post-Award Orientation Conference (cont.)

- Note questions.
  - Ask **how** questions, e.g. how to track mileage and time cards.
- Best to speak up early and ask for help than to incur charges for which you may not be reimbursed.
- Once an award is made, the application or proposal is no longer relevant. Always rely upon the award language.
- Be prepared to discuss timelines, e.g. when the work plan and the performance monitoring plan will be due.
- Discuss format for work plan.

13

- As you and your staff read through the award and AOR/COR designation letter, make sure you note questions to ask during the post-award orientation conference.
  - During the post-award orientation conference, feel free to ask how questions. For example, if you don't know the proper way to track mileage or ensure that you are properly accounting for time, ask the financial analyst for advice.
- It's best to speak up early and ask for help than to incur charges for which you may not be reimbursed.
- Also once an award is made, the application or proposal is no longer relevant. Rather, you should always rely upon the language included in the award itself, as you will be bound by the terms of the program description.
- Be prepared to discuss timelines, for example when the work plan and the performance monitoring plan will be due.
- Lastly, during the briefing itself, you may want to discuss with the AOR/COR what his or her expectations are for the format of the work plan (for example, a narrative, chart, or both).
- In the next few slides, we'll cover some frequently asked questions with some tips on how to prepare before the conference – including budget terms, sub-award approvals, environmental compliance, and exemption or

reimbursement of taxes / customs duties.



## Budget Terms

- Total Estimated Cost (TEC) for contracts; Total Estimated Amount (TEA) for grant and cooperative agreements
- Obligation Amount = for a particular fiscal year.
- Budget realignment / revision:
  - For realignments, TEC/TEA remain the same
  - For revisions, the TEC/TEA changes for the life of the award
- See [Financial Reporting e-module](#) and [ADS 302](#) and [ADS 303](#).

14

- Particularly for new partners, it can be challenging to understand all the different budget terms used in awards, so here is a quick guide with explanations. You also should be aware of the differences between award and obligation. An award has two significant numbers: the award amount and the obligated amount.
- The award amount is either the Total Estimated Cost for contracts or the Total Estimated Amount for grants and cooperative agreements. A TEC or Total Estimated Amount is intended to be spent over the life of the project.
- The obligated amount is the amount of money USAID has committed to the project and refers to a specific fiscal year. It's the money available to your organization to spend on the project at any particular time. USAID may add incremental funding for subsequent fiscal years. There is no guarantee that USAID will reimburse the recipient for any spending above the obligated amount. Thus without incremental funding for the next fiscal year, a partner should not incur costs above this obligation amount.
- We also often receive a lot of questions about what's the difference

between a budget realignment versus a budget revision.

- For realignments, TEC or Total Estimated Amount remains the same.
- When it comes to revisions, the TEC or Total Estimated Amount changes for the life of the award.
- These are just a few of the budget terms that may be used in your award. Make sure that you understand all of them by looking up their definitions before the conference and/or asking questions during the conference for more clarification. For more information about budget terms, see our e-module on financial reporting as well as ADS chapters 302 for contracts and ADS 303 for grants and cooperative agreements.



- The COR/AOR may have delegated authority to approve sub-awards under a certain amount.
- Provisions flow down to subs.
- If sub-award is already approved in prime award, do not need further AO/CO approval.
- Understand the differences between sub-awards and sub-contracts.
  - Grants under Contract (GUC) – see [e-module](#) on “Types of Awards”

- If your award allows for sub-awards, it's vital that you understand the processes required from the beginning. Carefully read the sections on sub-awards and note any questions that you or your staff may have.
- In many but not all awards, the CO or AO delegates to the COR or AOR the authority to approve sub-awards under a certain amount. For instance, the AOR may have authority to approve sub-awards up to \$100,000.
- Remember that provisions from a prime award flow down to sub-awardees.
- Also, if approval of a sub-award, as well as travel and personnel, already is included in the prime award, then further AO/CO approval is not needed.
- You also should understand the differences between when it's appropriate to use a sub-award versus a sub-contract. During the conference, talk through specific examples with your AO or CO and the AOR or COR so that you can understand the practicalities.
- For more information about sub-awards, sub-contracts, and grants under contracts, see our e-module on “Types of Awards.”



- All USAID funded activities undergo an environmental impact assessment:
  - Initial Environmental Examination (IEE),
  - Environmental Assessment (EA), or
  - a Request for a Categorical Exclusion in accordance with 22 CFR 216
- For more information:  
[Environmental Impact Assessment](#)



16

- As a U.S. federal government agency, USAID is subject to applicable U.S. environmental laws, regulations, Executive Orders, and procedures.
- USAID promotes environmentally sound design by requiring that all USAID funded activities undergo an environmental impact assessment. This is accomplished through an Initial Environmental Examination (IEE), an Environmental Assessment (EA) or a Request for a Categorical Exclusion, all in accordance with Title 22 of the Code of Federal Regulations Part 216, commonly known as 22 CFR 216 or "Reg 216."
- Before your orientation conference, you can read more information about environmental impact assessments and environmental compliance regulations and procedures through this link. Come prepared to ask questions at the conference for further clarification.



- Almost all countries have a bilateral framework agreement that exempt USG-funded programs from VAT and customs duties.
- Processes vary by each country.
- Ask questions about process in the country in which you are working.
- Standard provision on reporting taxes; how to fill out report, see [Pages 110-112 of this Guide](#).

- Almost all countries in which USAID works have a bilateral framework agreement that exempt U.S. Government-funded programs from value-added tax and customs duties. Generally, this applies to VAT levied on commodities and services purchased in-country and customs duties levied on commodities imported into the country for use in USAID-funded projects.
- The processes for qualifying for the exemptions or seeking reimbursement vary by each country's own laws and regulations. In some countries, USAID (most often through the Executive Office) may send an introduction letter to a host country's revenue authority, while in other countries the U.S. Embassy may notify the host country's tax authorities through an annual diplomatic note that includes a list of all U.S. Government funded partners.
- So during the post-award orientation conference you may want to ask questions about the process in the country in which you are working and how your organization may seek an exemption or reimbursement.
- Each year by April 16<sup>th</sup>, your organization must submit a report containing the value-added taxes or customs duties by the host country government. For more information about how to do this as well as a sample, see Pages

110-112 of the guide linked here.



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## After the Post-Award Orientation Conference

- Follow-up with any questions.
- Brief your organization's staff.
- Train staff on award management. See [other e-modules](#).
- Ask for help when needed.



18

- After the post-award orientation conference is complete, make sure you are completely clear on all the material covered in the briefing and follow-up with any additional questions as needed.
- You should brief your organization's staff and
- train them on award management soon after the post-award orientation conference. This will keep everyone on track to successfully implement your award. For training, feel free to refer your staff to this online training series.
- Doing so may also help identify more questions you can ask before they become a problem.

- **Prepare!**
- **Read the Award!**
- **Meet!**
- **Questions!**



To recap what we have learned in this module:

- Be sure to adequately **prepare** for the post-award orientation conference to maximize what you get out of it.
- To do so, it is absolutely crucial that you **read** the award in its entirety.
- Next, when it comes to the post-award orientation conference itself, meet with your staff in advance to review the award language and note questions as well as make sure all key personnel are in attendance.
- During the conference, ask many questions so that you may fully understand the award and what you need to do moving forward. Particularly if you are a new partner, you are not expected to know everything – such as all the regulations and policies that USAID must follow and that may be referenced in your award. Do not let it overwhelm you. Rather be pro-active in asking questions during the conference and throughout the implementation of your project.

Following all these tips will ensure that your organization is well prepare for the post-award orientation conference.



## Additional Information

- Review the [other e-modules](#) on programmatic reports, branding and marking, and financial reports.
- Look up references:
  - For contracts: [FAR](#) – Federal Acquisition Regulation; [AIDAR](#); [ADS 302](#)
  - For grants and cooperative agreements: [2 CFR 200](#); [2 CFR 700](#); [ADS 303](#)
- Feedback: [howtoworkwithusaid@usaid.gov](mailto:howtoworkwithusaid@usaid.gov)

20

- In this module, we highlighted a few examples to consider when preparing for a post-award briefing. These are only a sample meant to trigger your thoughts about questions to prepare and certainly is not exhaustive of all the topics you will need to master in managing your USAID award.
- We suggest that you and your staff review the other e-modules on programmatic reports, branding and marking, and financial reports.
- Also, when reading through your award, if you do not understand a reference, make sure to look it up through the reference links listed here. Make notes of any questions so that you may ask them during the post-award briefing.
- This concludes our e-module on post-award orientation conferences. We hope that you have found it to be helpful and appreciate your feedback, which you may send to [howtoworkwithusaid@usaid.gov](mailto:howtoworkwithusaid@usaid.gov). Thank you for your time.



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## Cumulative Knowledge Check!

The following questions will check how well you have understood the content in this E-Module.

Instructions: Read each question carefully and select your answer before clicking “submit” and moving on to the next question.

After you have finished all of the questions, click “finish” to proceed to your results. After reviewing your results, you may decide if you have an adequate understanding of the content of this e-module.

Who will host the post-award orientation conference?

- Activity Manager
- All or 20 or 400 items
- All or 100

## Post-Award Orientation Conference Quiz

Quiz - 5 questions

Last Modified: Feb 22, 2016 at 10:31 PM

### PROPERTIES

On passing, 'Finish' button: [Goes to Next Slide](#)

On failing, 'Finish' button: [Goes to Next Slide](#)

Allow user to leave quiz: [At any time](#)

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This E-Module was produced by the United States Agency for International Development.

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23

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